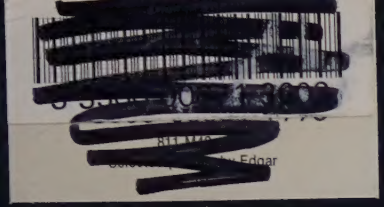

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SELECTED POEMS

BY

EDGAR LEE MASTERS

Children of the Market Place
Domesday Book
The Great Valley
Mitch Miller
The Open Sea
Skeeters Kirby
Songs and Satires
Spoon River Anthology
Starved Rock
Toward the Gulf

SELECTED POEMS

BY

EDGAR LEE MASTERS

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1925
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TO

JOHN COWPER POWYS

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NOTE

These "Selected Poems" have been chosen by myself from "Songs and Satires," published in 1916; "The Great Valley," published in 1917; "Toward the Gulf," published in 1918; "Starved Rock," published in 1919; "Domesday Book" and "The Open Sea," published respectively in 1920 and 1921; and from "The Spoon River Anthology," published in 1915; and "The New Spoon River," published in 1924. As these books aggregate more than two thousand pages my problem has been to follow a plan of selection which would satisfy readers desiring to know the variety and the quality of the themes, and the measures in which I have expressed myself, leaving stimulated interest to have recourse to the books from which these poems have been taken, for a complete survey of their contents. "Domesday Book" alone runs to nearly four hundred pages, and is concerned with one theme; so that in making a choice from it I have taken a monologue which may be understood without recurrence to the body of the book. In the same manner I have reproduced here twenty epitaphs from the two hundred and forty-six epitaphs of "The Spoon River Anthology"; and twenty from the three hundred and twenty-two epitaphs of "The New Spoon River." These stand by themselves as poems, and so detached are completely intelligible, since they are not concerned with themes developed in those books through the medium of several interrelated portrayals. I wish to express to Mr. Horace Liveright my cordial appreciation of his generous attitude toward this project, by which I have been able to incorporate in this book what I have chosen from "The New Spoon River."

EDGAR LEE MASTERS.

May 30, 1925.

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DRAMATIC PORTRAITS

SELECTED POEMS

THE DECISION

(*April 14th, 1861.*)

Lincoln is sitting absorbed in thought in an office of the executive mansion, where he has been in consultation with his cabinet. A telegraph instrument has ceased to click, but the wires are droning. Lincoln suddenly falls into a sleep, at once profound and trancelike. In the vision members of his cabinet and secretaries move in and out of the room.

LINCOLN

So there are five?

A VOICE

Yes, five to two.

SEWARD'S VOICE

A month
Has gone by and no policy. You should
Take hold yourself, or on a cabinet member
Devolve the task.

LINCOLN

Whatever's to be done
Is mine to do.

SEWARD'S VOICE

Fort Sumter leave alone!
If we employ armed force we have begun
A civil war—without armed force we fail.
We cannot take the fort and keep the fort,
Unless we subjugate the States as well.
No, let us not first draw the sword.

LINCOLN

To say—

A VOICE

Yes, five to two.

SEWARD'S VOICE

Your cabinet opposes
The Fort's provisioning.

LINCOLN

The property
And military posts, the forts which were
In our possession when the government
Came to my hands, I shall defend and hold.
I shall collect the duties, but beyond
Such things make no invasion.

A VOICE

And the mails?

ANOTHER VOICE

For Sumter has been shelled!

SEWARD'S VOICE

So I forewarned you.

ANOTHER VOICE

That was an error.

ANOTHER VOICE

May I ask a question?
Will you invade the country to collect
The duties, or relieve a fort alone
Where duties are in question?

LINCOLN

My inaugural—

ANOTHER VOICE

To hell with forts and duties—free the slaves!

SEWARD'S VOICE

Drop slavery! Before the people raise
The question: Is it Union or Disunion!

ANOTHER VOICE

I say to let the erring Sisters go.

ANOTHER VOICE

I care more for the principles—

ANOTHER VOICE

Be still!

I'm sick of principles—

THE SAME VOICE

The principles

Of local democratic government are worth
Twice over all the niggers.

ANOTHER VOICE

Senator,

You are most eloquent when full of drink.

ANOTHER VOICE

Would you unite the North? Maneuver them
To fire upon the Fort.

ANOTHER VOICE

The time has come

To open up the question with the sword:
Is this a league, is this a nation, which?

ANOTHER VOICE

What do you want, a tariff or a bank?
Take off your nigger mask, you centralist!

ANOTHER VOICE

A contract broken by a signatory
Absolves the other signatory.

ANOTHER VOICE

Yes,

The Yankee cotton spinner—

ANOTHER VOICE

Singing psalms!

ANOTHER VOICE

The radicals have brought us to this pass,
This agitation, hatred sectional.

DOUGLAS' VOICE

All seem to overlook this vital matter:
The President can use the military
Only where States request it.

ANOTHER VOICE

You forget
The act of '95.

DOUGLAS' VOICE

I don't forget.
The act of '95 does not apply,
Except to laws resisted, where a marshal
Is overpowered.

ANOTHER VOICE

And there is no marshal,
There is no judge in the seceded States.

ANOTHER VOICE

You will appoint one, so you promised.

LINCOLN

Yes.

DOUGLAS' VOICE

Then, sir, what cause is there for apprehension?
Who dares to say your President will pursue
A policy of war, unless he call
On Congress for the means and for the power?

ANOTHER VOICE

I ask about Fort Sumter—are there ships
With cargoes of provision on their way?

ANOTHER VOICE

Yes, they have sailed.

OTHER VOICES

No! No!

ANOTHER VOICE

Oh, yes, the seven governors from the North
Have changed his policy. He now intends
To overthrow the federative law.
O great conspiracy—O seven-headed
Apocalyptic Beast!

The vision grows confused. Lincoln seems to himself to attempt to rise from the chair, but is unable to do so. The scene whirls about like drifting mist, struck by a sudden current of air, in which there are lights and faces. Voices are mingled together indistinguishably and then fade away. There is a silence. Out of the confusion two figures emerge, one bright, the other shadowy. Both are images of Lincoln. They become seated in a boat which is moving with great rapidity. The only sound is the droning of the telegraph.

FIRST PHANTOM

Twice have I seen this fateful scene before.

SECOND PHANTOM

The depths are moving, but no waters roar.
A mountain silence clasps the air and sea.
Look through the glassy fathoms far below:
Beneath us glides the ocean's dizzy floor
Which we skim over with a swallow's speed.

FIRST PHANTOM

I see a shadowy shore and precipices.
Yes, this portends my spirit's earthly woe.

SECOND PHANTOM

You shall not shrink! What though your heart shall bleed
Its last drop out walking the abysses,

You must go forth—the hour has struck for you!
The little freedoms of your life are past,
As youth may choose its work or happiness;
Now you must steer the boat through fog and blast.
This rock encircled water is no less
Than your soul captured in the trap of Fate.
Far over stands 'twixt earth and heaven a gate
Where souls depart and enter into Time.
You must set foot upon this shore and climb,
And blindly your election make, renew
Your will and spirit.

FIRST PHANTOM

Tell me what to do?

SECOND PHANTOM

Heal, if you can, the nation's growing scars,
Let harmony come out of harsh discord.

FIRST PHANTOM

Suppose the seven States first draw the sword?
Have they not drawn it now?

SECOND PHANTOM

All bloody wars
Furnish great argument to place the blame
For the first blow. But even if it's blood
That blots the bond of human brotherhood,
Behold the pangs that flow from human pride
When slaughter by such blood is justified.

FIRST PHANTOM

What shall I do with giants who rebel?

SECOND PHANTOM

You do but traffic in a word, a name,
A word it is with which you may inflame
To mob-like fury a judicious nation—
So you may enter on an usurpation.

First Phantom

What do you say? Am I a tyrant then?

Second Phantom

Already have you thought of arming men
Without the sovereign sanction of the law.

First Phantom

But if I don't, mad Treason will have gained
Such progress that it will have quite attained
Its purpose to bind down and overawe
Conciliation or resistance even.

Second Phantom

You arrogate the very will of heaven,
As tyrants do, and in your purpose find
A small reflection of the eternal mind.
What do you know of this? But if you rest
On human will and thought you must concede
A contradiction in your dream, who break
The law a rebel spirit to arrest.
This is a way of sowing nettle seed.
Once you were faithful to a better creed,
That men may found new nations when the old
No longer have the people's fair consent.
Rights are not hostile. If this be a right
How may you overthrow it with your might?

First Phantom

Have you not heard this story of me told:
At New Orleans I saw the children cry
When from the auction block their sire was sold.
I then resolved to strike this curse a blow
If ever Heaven gave
My arm the strength. It is my deepest hate.

Second Phantom

This is the thought then lying further back
In your fanatic spirit, child of woe,
Reached through a devious and hidden track!

For this you will prepare your country's grave.
You will free some, but only to enslave
A wider realm of being.

FIRST PHANTOM

I would know
What may be best.

SECOND PHANTOM

The country is at peace.
You do not dare to ask your Congress for
Troops on the Southern people to make war.

FIRST PHANTOM

I do not need to ask. I have enrolled
An oath with God the Nation to uphold.

SECOND PHANTOM

But if you call the troops will you not ask
Congress to validate your powers' increase,
And sharpening of the sword for such a task?
You do not answer. Well, if this may be,
Do you not contemplate a tyranny?

FIRST PHANTOM

What is this rupture but a mere defection,
What might be called rebellion, insurrection
Against the laws, which I must overthrow,
As others did before me from the first?
No word writ in the charter of the nation
Has made provision for its termination.

SECOND PHANTOM

But not to argue this—you have reversed
Your mind upon the right of revolution.

FIRST PHANTOM

Not for a righteous or a holy cause.

SECOND PHANTOM

You test it in your own soul's resolution.
But tell me when there are no writs or laws
For you to execute in the Southern land
How are you acting?

FIRST PHANTOM

But I still command
The property and forts, and other places
Belonging to the Nation.

SECOND PHANTOM

Understand
Their territory all such forts embraces,
And sovereignty thereover is resumed.
You cannot have a war on that account,
When they would pay you for the places lost.

FIRST PHANTOM

First the rebellious spirit must surmount
The barriers that keep them home with us.
They cannot leave us, cannot take and hold
What is not theirs, or what if they had sold
They could not grant.

SECOND PHANTOM

That is but bloody gold
And what you say if acted on will bring
A million deaths.

FIRST PHANTOM

They are responsible
For all the consequences if they cling
To this rebellious purpose.

SECOND PHANTOM

To compel
This fortress's provisioning
Will be a blow first struck. It is the law:
The first blow of war is struck by him
Who makes the first blow needful to be struck.

FIRST PHANTOM

You put the woven substance in a ruck.
I leave the issue of a war with them.
They shall not be assailed, nor may they have
Conflict with me unless they first aggress
The governmen‘

SECOND PHANTOM

Oh, then they must withdraw
Resistance to your plan.

FIRST PHANTOM

Well, I confess
No open plan, as yet. But now attend:
I have an oath in heaven registered
The Union to preserve, protect, defend;
They have no oath the Union to destroy.

SECOND PHANTOM

What is the Union but a verbal toy
Like Justice, Beauty, Liberty or Truth?
And as for them, they need not take an oath,
They need but act.

FIRST PHANTOM

The Union is unbroken, is a pact
Which cannot be erased or torn apart
By less than half of those who gave it breath.

SECOND PHANTOM

How does a State sink partly into death
By joining other States? Can it accede
And thereby lose its virtue to secede?

FIRST PHANTOM

The Union is much older than accession.

SECOND PHANTOM

Some Union, not the Union which you rule.
The States which formed the old Confederacy

Withdrew to form the Union. Liberty
Is older than all States.
Her handmaiden has always been secession.

First Phantom

These arguments are used but to befool
The minds who loathe the wrong they would conceal.
No justice will be lost by him who waits.

Second Phantom

They ask a council for the general weal
Of all the States these matters to arrange
Without the flow of blood.

Second Phantom

I shall not change
What I have said: If God who rules above,
Almighty Ruler of all nations, deems
Eternal truth with them, or with our side,
That truth eternal must abide.

Second Phantom

But after all, the truth is that which seems
The truth to you. And if mankind you love,
Why draw the sword to justify such truth?
Has any warrior of the world said more?

First Phantom

The people may be trusted to restore
All broken rights; to them I leave all things.

Second Phantom

What do you say? These dubious wanderings
Travel along a pathway scarcely smooth.
You vowed to let no forces intermit
The Nation's laws in no place, save the means
Which should be requisite,
Were by the people from your arms withheld.
You do not let them choose when you've compelled
Their action by your act, which intervenes

Their virgin will and what you do before
You learn its voice. Yes, so arise all wars!
What people ever had a chance to voice
Free and deliberate their honest choice
'Twixt war and peace? Kings leave them to deplore
The initial step while fighting to retrieve
Or mitigate its ills. Your counselors
Have spoken, and your counselors believe
The pending step unwise. So at the last
Out of all dialectics stand two men
Each judging, each appealing to the shrine
Of God, Eternal Justice, all unknown,
Save as they see reflections of them cast
In their refracted speculations—then
What is it but the clash of sovereignties
Grown firmer from offense and wounded pride?
Yet cunning to manipulate decrees
With forethought in successive acts to hide
Provocative offenses, put in fault
The other sovereigns for the first assault.

First Phantom

One man may risk his life, or suffer wrong,
He has no other but himself at stake.
A ruler has been chosen to be strong,
And save his people for his people's sake.
The clearest vision, most commanding power,
Interprets and must rule the hour,
Must call its purest sense of duty God.
Must stake its being now, in worlds to come
Before what thrones of judgment chance to be.
One phase alone of life's immensity
May one o'ermaster, though it bring him doom
For things unseen, the path he never trod
Strewn with his errors. Yet he may be free
By acting through that genesis and win
Approval for the warp. No soul has room
For growth in love, but may it also thrive
To needed power in thought. If heaven require
Excess in either, while the other shrinks

In heaven's ends, should heaven then requite
The sacrifice with penitential fire?
It is enough that whosoever drinks
Of such success finds bitterness within
The cup on earth. Can anyone begrudge
The work before me, sword that I possess?
Nor do I of another's motives judge.
If rights conflict not, yet one master right
Attuned to highest law must still prevail
And lesser laws must fail.
The winds of destiny may bear me far,
Which out of deepest heaven are arising.
I have one compass and one guiding star,
One altar for my spirit's sacrificing:
The Union is my soul's profoundest love.

SECOND PHANTOM

If you knew heaven's wish you might fulfill it,
Seen heaven's law revealed, then you might will it,
What man can say he knows the word thereof?
Oh, not alone you dedicate your life
To this adventure in uncertain strife!
You give the Nation's blood and spirit too.
If you could know the Nation would renew
Its strength in years or cycles from your thought,
And through your godlike daring might be wrought
To finer triumphs in the time to come,
You would have warrant to pronounce the doom
Of blood and tears to fertilize the soil,
Where at the start revenge and hate will grow.
But what unending sorrow may recoil
Upon your purposes, who do not know?

FIRST PHANTOM

What are these cliffs of purple which we near?
Gray wastes of stagnant mists above them lie.
The boat glides downward as if in a sphere
Of liquid crystal flowing dizzily
The forked rocks point upward to the sky—
Have I then died?

SECOND PHANTOM

There is a place of moss
Whereon the prow must strike lest it be crushed.

FIRST PHANTOM

This is the world's end. How the air is hushed!

SECOND PHANTOM

Come now! You have been ferried well across
There! We have landed. Hear the whispering keel.

FIRST PHANTOM

I'm growing faint.

SECOND PHANTOM

Much still must I reveal.
We two must stand on yonder highest rock.

FIRST PHANTOM

It cannot be!

SECOND PHANTOM

I will the door unlock.
They may not be away. First let me knock.

(*He knocks on the cliff. The vision grows cloudy.*)

FIRST PHANTOM

What heights are these where midway to the sea
The gulls like flakes of snow eddy around!

SECOND PHANTOM

The purple wastes lie under a shorn sun.
They do not bleed, no golden ooze is seen,
No arrows pierce them.

FIRST PHANTOM

And how could it be?
A barrier of mud, a sunken realm
With shores where wrecks are rotting are before you.
They sleep upon the tideless water.

SECOND PHANTOM

Yes,
This is a quiet sea of perished dreams!

FIRST PHANTOM

Greater than Asia was this kingdom once,
But in a war it sank.

SECOND PHANTOM

What is the tale?

FIRST PHANTOM

There was a city set upon a hill
Which heaven governed as a pilot guides
The vessel from the stern, by force of thought.
Till spirits here were given air and light
To prove their natures, for it was the wish
Of that first pair which built its earliest hearth.
There since the husband worked with iron and fire,
Where twenty bellows blew, and all the day
The anvil sounded in a shop, which seemed
A palace thick with stars, and giants bore
Great burdens, wielded sledges, and obeyed
The master workman, so the city heaped
Great store of armament and priceless works.
Meanwhile the woman in whose eyes and brow
The final reason, compress of all light
Made of all lights absorbed, resolved, and tamed
Lay like a high serenity of power,
Or balanced wisdom, bore great sons to rule
The state and to preserve it in the wars,
When wars should come. In peace to keep the courts,
And laws like to their mother's face, a face
Which awed the dullest slave, out of whose brain
The idea like a statue carved in rock
By hammers broken, rolled, beholding it.
She taught her sons that some are born to rule,
And some to serve, and some to carry torches,
And some to blow the bellows for the fire
Where torches may be lit; and how a state

Where high and low remain as high and low
So long as nature wills, move in a sphere
Of democratic laws, where all may have
The bread they earn, and where no strength may seize
Another's happiness, another's bread.
Hence was it that she fired her sons to drive
A giant troubler from the city's gates,
And shut him up in Sicily.

But the land
Over whose hills and vales the waters lie,
There where we look had other life. I speak:
It was a land of many lakes and rivers,
And plains and meadows, mountains full of ore,
Both gold and silver, copper, precious stones.
And valued wood, most fruitful of all things,
Herbage or roots, or corn, whatever gives
Delight or sustenance. And the ruler's strength
Brought riches from all ports. But to relate
Its founder's part, the country was divided
Among ten rulers who had sworn to obey
Injunctions carven on a shaft of gold,
Erected in the middle of the realm.
And here the people of the several states
Gathered for conference on the general weal,
And to inquire if any of the states
Had trespassed on the other, or transgressed
The writing on the shaft of gold, and pass
Appropriate judgment; for upon the shaft
Curses were graven on the recreant.
And it was written none should take up arms
Against the other; and if one should raise
His hand against the central strength (for where
The shaft of gold stood, there a palace stood
Where lived a ruler speaking for them all),
Then should the others rescue it and fling
The rebels back.

Such was this empire lost
And so did it remain so long as men

Obeyed the laws and Heaven loved. At first
They practiced wisdom, they despised all things
Save virtue only, lightly thought of gold,
Were sober, hated luxury, knew control
Of passions and of self. And knew that wealth
Grows with such virtues, and by unity
With one another, but by zeal for wealth
All friendship dies. And so they waxed in store
Of gold and spirit. But at last the soul,
Which was divine and moved in them, fell off
And weakened, grew diluted with too much
Of human nature, and became unjust,
Cruel and base, voracious, drunken, lost
To wisdom, discipline; and the seeing eye
Saw all good things forgotten, but to those
Who had no eye to see true happiness
They still appeared most blest and glorious,
Filled as they were with avarice and lust.
So then arose one state, and then another
Against the central ruler, none was free
Of disobedience to the graven words
Upon the shaft of gold, until at last
The city on the hill, watching the strife,
Embarked with troops.

SECOND PHANTOM

Have you not prophesied
Your country's fate if you assault the South?
It is the zeal for wealth that cries for war.
From such a war our spirit shall be lost,
Our justice fouled, our friendship turned to hate,
Our laughter rendered drunken. We shall be
The city on the hill, the island lost—
Have both not perished?

FIRST PHANTOM

Stay! It is enough
To live amid the misery of to-day,
Without this contemplation of the past.
What is this sky, this earth to which we come?

This nothingness, thus substance, air and rock
Which to our life is hard reality,
And to our thought a dream? All nature sings,
Creates, rejoices, man alone has life
In pain as life, unfolding life as pain,
As if a child could live, but never be
Delivered from the womb. And for myself
What am I but a creature, heart and head,
Hands reaching up to catch at rock or bough?
Hands, heart and head of flesh, immortal fire,
With feet unshapen, still a part of earth,
Where from that undistinguished mass of clay
Hands, heart and head would pluck them? I could faint,
Fly from the task before me but for this:
The will which when confronted bares its face
And says go on, or lie down with the beasts
In silence and corruption. Let me look
No more upon this sea!

SECOND PHANTOM

Where shall we go?

FIRST PHANTOM

To some place less disquieting, more secure.

(They leave the heights and descend,
approaching a mysterious place
where heaven and earth are connected by gates.)

FIRST PHANTOM

I can no further walk or fly.

SECOND PHANTOM

You enter at these gates near by.

FIRST PHANTOM

I fall through space. Your hand, my friend.

SECOND PHANTOM

Quietly like a star descend.

(They pass through the gates into a meadow.)

First Phantom

What is this meadow which I see?

Second Phantom

Here come the souls of men to be.
Can you remember what you said
Among the living and the dead:
I would know heaven's deepest law,
And flood the world of men with light,
I would bring justice and be just.

First Phantom

Out of each soul's prenatal night
Something of what you say returns.
The soul descending into dust
Loses its memory as it burns
Less brightly, when the spirit wanes.

Second Phantom

Behold that pillar of splendor shining
And bound to earth and heaven by chains!
You see the distaff to it fixed
And in the distaff whorls of iron,
Each rising to a higher rim,
And on each whirling rim a siren
Chants, as you hear, her solemn hymn.

First Phantom

I hear it with the singing mixed
Of one, upon whose giant knee
The distaff turns to hands that reach
From thrones, which stand at equal spaces.

Second Phantom

The giant is Necessity,
The Fates are reaching from the thrones.

First Phantom

Such garlands for such darkened faces!
What are these solemn monotones,
Which are not music, are not speech?

SECOND PHANTOM

They labor through Eternity.
The Universe of visible things
Turns with the distaff here again.
The dead come back with questionings
Of earthly failure, loss or pain,
And would choose better than before.
Some say that Agamemnon chose
The loneliness of eagle wings,
In hatred of his mortal woes.

FIRST PHANTOM

From dreams like these I must be free! I know,
Dread phantom, you are nothing but myself.
You stand before me lately, mocking elf,
Too much, and follow me where'er I go.
What this portends I know not, death I fear.
But what seems just to do I shall perform.
A nation's destiny is mine to steer,
A people's hope is on me in the storm.
Behind these voices when they sing or laugh
I hear the droning of the telegraph:
Come! I would study now the last dispatches.

SECOND PHANTOM

No meaning it is clear your soul attaches
To thrones, or sirens, or the giant knees.
You have not fixed upon a policy.

FIRST PHANTOM

I shall be guided—

SECOND PHANTOM

By necessity—

FIRST PHANTOM

Well, yes, but by the will of God as well.

SECOND PHANTOM

How can you tell it from the will of hell?

(*Voices from the thrones.*)

FIRST THRONE

Here I sit spinning
From what beginning
Did I begin?

SECOND THRONE

Give me the thread!
I will assign him
Grief to refine him,
Thorns for his head.
Toil never ending
Up from his birth,
This shall be leaven
To lift him from earth
Up into heaven.

(*Many souls are crowded into the meadow. A figure takes from the lap of Lachesis lots and scatters them.*)

SECOND PHANTOM

Who honors heaven, heaven wins.
Not here your fate on earth begins.
I only show you where you stood
Amid the fates and now your work
Of justice and of brotherhood.
You're weary, yet you cannot shirk
The task assumed—how it increases!
A giant hand thrust in releases
The numbered lots of woe and bliss,
There from the lap of Lachesis,
And throws them to the multitude
Awaiting mortal strife.

SECOND PHANTOM

One fluttered to his hand. He ran
Between the thrones, the distaff under
Which swayed and rolled upon her knees.
The chains that bound it clanked and creaked.
The far-off depths the lightning streaked,

Uprolled the deep symphonic thunder,
Which rumbled like a chariot, till
Its echoes died and all was still,
Save for the tinkling pipe and purl
As faster sped the seventh whorl.
We nodded, laughing at the game,
And said: He's dreaming Pericles,
Who gave his soul to ancient Greece.
What will he do with such a name?

SECOND PHANTOM

Do you remember?

FIRST PHANTOM

I remember

A dream I had in early youth:
My birth was humble, still I dreamed
To consecrate my life to Truth,
And for the truth to be esteemed.
I love the Republic, I would see
Its soil and all its people free!

(*The Furies enter.*)

THE THRONES

Heaven and God are under us. Reveal
We never may what end the law achieves.
He shall be free who with increasing zeal
Still labors and believes

THE FURIES

You may deceive this fellow with such stuff;
We have seen history woven long enough
To know the good men plan at least by half
Results in evil.

THE THRONES

Be the epitaph

Of him who moulds his being by this thought:
"He doubted, failure marked the work he wrought."

THE FURIES

What is the law, then, that he must obey?

THE THRONES

The law that has most universal sway.

THE FURIES

What may that be? Is it to choose the good?

THE THRONES

You know his dream of human brotherhood.

THE FURIES

He must seize power such dreams to realize.
In usurpation great corruption lies.

FIRST PHANTOM

What is this shape I deal with? It is whole,
Inseparable forever, with a soul.
It is a life of undivided breath.
To break its body is to give it death.

THE FURIES

There might be two souls where before was one.

FIRST PHANTOM

From heaven's battlements a clarion
Shivers the mystic chords of memory,
Stretched forth from every grave and battlefield,
My life may pay the forfeit—let it be.
Destroy me if you will, I shall not yield
To anarch forces.

THE FURIES

Then by tyranny
You'll break the giants if they dare rebel.
Men through the giants only may be free.
Destroy them or enchain them and you quell
The Titan powers by whom there came
Freedom's Promethean flame.

The Thrones

Whence is the Voice,
Which sings the eternal theme
Of giants whirled
Beneath the thunderbolts of Strength supreme;
Of angels who have made the fateful choice,
From heaven headlong hurled?
Of Odin, in Valhalla, keeping guard
Against the malice of the giant world,
Slaying the mighty Ymir?
And what was their reward
Who warred upon the Thunderer
For sovereignty for pity of mankind?—
Go bear in pain the burden of the earth,
Or under mountains blind
Breathe hateful fire;
Or moan your agony and fallen wrath
Chained to the rocks.
So shall thought rule, not force, or their desire,
Which is the law of music not of bread,
Or lower ordinance. Do you now tread,
Mortal, the path of service to the race?
Do you bring fire, or quell disharmony,
Destroy the Titans? In all time and space
Freedom is only for the wise and free!

The Thrones

A hand like lightning from a thunder cloud
Reaches from heaven to the apron's folds,
And takes the inscrutable lots,
And scatters them among the spectral crowd.
On them are written labors, wars and plots.
Thus are they thrown, like snow they fall where'er
They may be driven by the unseen air,
Which moves so thinly here no eye beholds
Its coming and its going. They shall fall
Where chance may govern. Look! These two shall find
Their fate and incarnation, work above
This meadow under earth. Not wholly blind
Shall they select the soul they would be like—

That they may will in part—the rest shall be
Ruled by the working of a destiny
Of our appointing when the hour shall strike,
Commissioned under seal to say "Arise
The hour has struck."

FIRST PHANTOM

My other self, your hand.

SECOND PHANTOM

We must be one, not two.

FIRST PHANTOM

We must not stand
In strength, intentions, visions separate.

(*The two phantoms become one.*)

THE THRONES

O soul, now one which just before was two,
What is your deepest love?

THE PHANTOM

It is the True.
I love the Right, the Good, confederate
And in this order, ruling, not apart:
If this may be, mind, conscience, heart
In harmony and balanced equipoise,
I would possess, and I would have a voice
To sway with truth.

THE THRONES

Choose then O Soul your fate!

THE PHANTOM

Down bending I obey. What have I done?

FIRST THRONE

Come Destiny and overwatch your son.

The Destiny

Behold I loved and kept the public good
Forever in my eye. At my command
Were many armies, cities, islands, realms
Which I ruled over with a master hand.
And where I could not lead by gentle word
I forced compliance, so my power withstood
Internal quarrels and the foreign sword.
But when I left the life of earth they came
Around my bed, a worthy group, and spoke
My trophies and authority and fame.
Not one took notice of my greatest deeds:
No father's heart for my fault ever broke,
Nor wailing woman tore her widow's weeds.
Law, Freedom, Progress, Virtue, Beauty, Truth,
Humility, Religion, Knowledge lay
Along the pathway of my city's youth.
Ill fortune forced imperial temptation,
And these divided, even by heaven sundered,
Left empire and left riches to a sway
O'er Beauty, Knowledge, Progress, till the day
Of hatred, envy, bitter disputation,
All good was sunk. Its walls and temples thundered,
My city on the hill was crushed and fell
Through lust of riches, from its elevation.
Study my problem and my spirit well.
Yours are not greatly different—beware
Great riches for your country, lest they come
With weakness and debasement for a snare.
And to this end curb studied greed and those
Spirits luxurious, and adventuresome;
And those unjust, their hatred, guile oppose.
Right is a thing 'twixt equals, and the strong
Do what they can, the weak must suffer wrong.
Therefore the balance hold for all, assuage
The fury and revenge which yet may rage
Around your fallen brothers, when you ride
Triumphant.

SECOND THRONE

Now conduct him to our side
Beneath the distaff in my hand.
Thus is his fate forever ratified.

(*The Image Passes.*)

THIRD THRONE

Now hither bring him,—thus I breathe my spell.
His doom is now made irreversible.

THE THRONE OF NECESSITY

Pass under me. Now of this cup drink deep.
There, he has drunk it, and so falls in sleep.
Now guard him, Destiny!

(*A sound of cannon. Lincoln awakes. The Secretary of War enters.*)

THE SECRETARY OF WAR

Fort Sumter has been fired on!

LINCOLN

Call the troops!

TO-MORROW IS MY BIRTHDAY

Well, then, another drink! Ben Jonson knows,
So do you, Michael Drayton, that to-morrow
I reach my fifty-second year. But hark ye,
To-morrow lacks two days of being a month—
Here is a secret—since I made my will.
Heigh ho! that's done too! I wonder why I did it?
That I should make a will! Yet it may be
That then and jump at this most crescent hour
Heaven inspired the deed.

As a mad younker
I knew an aged man in Warwickshire

Who used to say, "Ah, mercy me," for sadness
Of change, or passing time, or secret thoughts.
If it was spring he sighed it, if 'twas fall,
With drifting leaves, he looked upon the rain,
And with a doleful suspiration kept
This habit of his grief. And on a time
As he stood looking at the flying clouds,
I loitering near, expectant, heard him say it,
Inquired, "Why do you say 'Ah, mercy me,'
Now that it's April?" So he hobbled off
And left me empty there.

Now here am I!
Oh, it is strange to find myself this age,
And rustling like a peascod, though unshelled;
And, like this aged man of Warwickshire,
Slaved by a mood which must have breath—"Tra-la!"
That's what I say instead of "Ah, mercy me."
For look you, Ben, I catch myself with "Tra-la"
The moment I break sleep to see the day.
At work, alone, vexed, laughing, mad or glad
I say, "Tra-la" unknowing. Oft at table
I say, "Tra-la." And 'tother day, poor Anne
Looked long at me and said, "You say, 'Tra-la'
Sometimes when you're asleep; why do you so?"
Then I bethought me of that aged man
Who used to say, "Ah, mercy me," but answered:
"Perhaps I am so happy when awake
The song crops out in slumber—who can say?"
And Anne arose, began to keel the pot,
But was she answered, Ben? Who know a woman?

To-morrow is my birthday. If I die,
Slip out of this with Bacchus for a guide,
What soul would interdict the poppied way?
Heroes may look the Monster down, a child
Can wilt a lion, who is cowed to see
Such bland unreckoning of his strength—but I,
Having so greatly lived, would sink away
Unknowing my departure. I have died

A thousand times, and with a valiant soul
Have drunk the cup, but why? In such a death
To-morrow shines and there's a place to lean.
But in this death that has no bottom to it,
No bank beyond, no place to step, the soul
Grows sick, and like a falling dream we shrink
From that inane which gulfs us, without place
For us to stand and see it.

Yet, dear Ben,
This thing must be; that's what we live to know
Out of long dreaming, saying that we know it.
As yeasty heroes in their braggart teens
Spout learnedly of war, who never saw
A cannon aimed. You drink too much to-day,
Or get a scratch while turning Lucy's stile,
And like a beast you sicken. Like a beast
They cart you off. What matter if your thought
Outsoared the Phoenix? Like a beast you rot.
Methinks that something wants our flesh, as we
Hunger for flesh of beasts. But still to-morrow,
To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow
Creeps in this petty pace—O, Michael Drayton,
Some end must be. But 'twixt the fear of ceasing
And weariness of going on we lie
Upon these thorns!

These several springs I find
No new birth in the Spring. And yet in London
I used to cry, "O, would I were in Stratford;
It's April and the larks are singing now.
The flags are green along the Avon river;
O, would I were a rambler in the fields.
This poor machine is racing to its wreck.
This grist of thought is endless, this old sorrow
Sprouts, winds and crawls in London's darkness.
Come
Back to your landscape! Peradventure waits
Some woman there who will make new the earth,
And crown the spring with fire."

So back I come.
And the springs march before me, say, "Behold
Here are we, and what would you, can you use us?
What good is air if lungs are out, or springs
When the mind's flown so far away no spring,
Nor loveliness of earth can call it back?
I tell you what it is: in early youth
The life is in the loins; by thirty years
It travels through the stomach to the lungs,
And then we strut and crow. By forty years
The fruit is swelling while the leaves are fresh.
By fifty years you're ripe, begin to rot.
At fifty-two, or fifty-five or sixty
The life is in the seed—what's spring to you?
Puff! Puff! You are so winged and light you fly.
For every passing zephyr, are blown off,
And drifting, God knows where, cry out "Tra-la,"
"Ah, mercy me," as it may happen you.
Puff! Puff! away you go!

Another drink?
Why, you may drown the earth with ale and I
Will drain it like a sea. The more I drink
The better I see that this is April time. . . .

Ben! There is one Voice which says to everything:
"Dream what you will, I'll make you bear your seed.
And, having borne, the sickle comes among ye
And takes your stalk." The rich and sappy greens
Of spring or June show life within the loins,
And all the world is fair, for now the plant
Can drink the level cup of flame where heaven
Is poured full by the sun. But when the blossom
Flutters its colors, then it takes the cup
And waves the stalk aside. And having drunk
The stalk to penury, then slumber comes
With dreams of spring stored in the imprisoned germ,
An old life and a new life all in one,
A thing of memory and of prophecy,
Of reminiscence, longing, hope and fear.

What has been ours is taken, what was ours
Becomes entailed on our seed in the spring,
Fees in possession and enjoyment too. . . .

The thing is sex, Ben. It is that which lives
And dies in us, makes April and unmakes,
And leaves a man like me at fifty-two,
Finished but living, on the pinnacle
Betwixt a death and birth, the earth consumed
And heaven rolled up to eyes whose troubled glances
Would shape again to something better—what?
Give me a woman, Ben, and I will pick
Out of this April, by this larger art
Of fifty-two, such songs as we have heard,
Both you and I, when weltering in the clouds
Of that eternity which comes in sleep,
Or in the viewless spinning of the soul
When most intense. The woman is somewhere,
And that's what tortures, when I think this field
So often gleaned could blossom once again
If I could find her.

Well, as to my plays:
I have not written out what I would write.
They have a thousand buds of finer flowering.
And over "Hamlet" hangs a teasing spirit
As fine to that as sense is fine to flesh.
Good friends, my soul beats up its prisoned wings
Against the ceiling of a vaster whorl,
And would break through and enter. But, fair friends,
What strength in place of sex shall steady me?
What is the motive of this higher mount?
What process in the making of myself—
The very fire, as it were, of my growth—
Shall furnish forth these writings by the way,
As incident, expression of the nature
Relumed for adding branches, twigs and leaves? . . .

Suppose I'd make a tragedy of this,
Focus my fancied "Dante" to this theme,

And leave my half writ "Sappho," which at best
Is just another delving in the mine
That gave me "Cleopatra" and the Sonnets?
If you have genius, write my tragedy,
And call it "Shakespeare, Gentleman of Stratford,"
Who lost his soul amid a thousand souls,
And had to live without it, yet live with it,
As wretched as the souls whose lives he lived.
Here is a play for you: Poor William Shakespeare,
This moment growing drunk, the famous author
Of certain sugared sonnets and some plays,
With this machine too much to him, which started
Some years ago, now cries him nay and runs,
Even when the house shakes and complains, "I fall,
You shake me down, my timbers break apart.
Why, if an engine must go on like this
The building should be stronger."

Or to mix,
And by the mixing, unmix metaphors,
No mortal man has blood enough for brains,
And stomach too, when the brain is never done
With thinking and creating.

For you see,
I pluck a flower, cut off a dragon's head—
Choose twixt these figures—lo, a dozen buds,
A dozen heads out-crop. For every fancy,
Play, sonnet, what you will, I write me out
With thinking "Now I'm done," a hundred others
Crowd up for voices, and, like twins unborn
Kick and turn o'er for entrance to the world.
And I, poor fecund creature, who would rest,
As 'twere from an importunate husband, fly
To money-lending, farming, mulberry trees,
Enclosing Welcombe fields, or idling hours
In common talk with people like the Combes.
All this to get a heartiness, a hold
On earth again, lest Heaven Hercules,
Finding me strayed to mid-air, kicking heels

Above the mountain tops, seize on my scruff
And bear me off, or strangle.

Good, my friends,
The "Tempest" is as nothing to the voice
That calls me to performance—what I know not.
I've planned an epic of the Asian wash,
Which slopped the star of Athens and put out,
Which should all history analyze, and present
A thousand notables in the guise of life,
And show the ancient world and worlds to come
To the last blade of thought and tiniest seed
Of growth to be. With visions such as these
My spirit turns in restless ecstacy,
And this enslavèd brain is master sponge,
And sucks the blood of body, hands and feet.
While my poor spirit, like a butterfly
Gummed in its shell, beats its bedraggled wings,
And cannot rise.

I'm cold, both hands and feet.
These three days past I have been cold, this hour
I am warm in three days. God bless the ale.
God did do well to give us anodynes. . . .
So now you know why I am much alone,
And cannot fellow with Augustine Phillips,
John Heminge, Richard Burbage, Henry Condell,
And do not have them here, dear ancient friends,
Who grieve, no doubt, and wonder for changed love.
Love is not love which alters when it finds
A change of heart, but mine has changed not, only
I cannot be my old self. I blaspheme:
I hunger for broiled fish, but fly the touch
Of hands of flesh.

I am most passionate,
And long am used perplexities of love
To bemoan and to bewail. And do you wonder,
Seeing what I am, what my fate has been?
Well, hark you; Anne is sixty now, and I,

A crater which erupts, look where she stands
In lava wrinkles, eight years older than I am,
As years go, but I am a youth afire,
While she is lean and slippered. It's a Fury
Which takes me sometimes, makes my hands clutch out
For virgins in their teens. O sullen fancy!
I want them not, I want the love which springs
Like flame which blots the sun, where fuel of body
Is piled in reckless generosity. . . .
You are most learned, Ben, Greek and Latin know,
And think me nature's child, scarce understand
How much of physic, law, and ancient annals
I have stored up by means of studious zeal.
But pass this by, and for the braggart breath
Ensuing now say, "Will was in his cups,
Potvaliant, boozed, corned, squiffy, obfuscated,
Crapulous, inter pocula, or so forth.
Good sir, or so, or friend, or gentleman,
According to the phrase or the addition
Of man and country, on my honor, Shakespeare
At Stratford, on the twenty-second of April,
Year sixteen-sixteen of our Lord was merry—
Videlicet, was drunk." Well, where was I?—
Oh yes, at braggart breath, and now to say it:
I believe and say it as I would lightly speak
Of the most common thing to sense, outside
Myself to touch or analyze, this mind
Which has been used by Something, as I use
A quill for writing, never in this world
In the most high and palmy days of Greece,
Or in this roaring age, has known its peer.
No soul as mine has lived, felt, suffered, dreamed,
Broke open spirit secrets, followed trails
Of passions curious, countless lives explored
As I have done. And what are Greek and Latin,
The lore of Aristotle, Plato to this?
Since I know them by what I am, the essence
From which their utterance came, myself a flower
Of every graft and being in myself
The recapitulation and the complex

Of all the great. Were not brains before books?
And even geometrics in some brain
Before old Gutenberg? O fie, Ben Jonson,
If I am nature's child am I not all?
Howe'er it be, ascribe this to the ale,
And say that reason in me was a fume.
But if you honor me, as you have said,
As much as any, this side idolatry,
Think, Ben, of this: That I, whate'er I be
In your regard, have come to fifty-two
Defeated in my love, who knew too well
That poets through the love of women turn
To satyrs or to gods, even as women
By the first touch of passion bloom or rot
As angels or as bawds.

Bethink you also
How I have felt, seen, known the mystic process,
Working in man's soul from the woman soul
As part thereof in essence, spirit and flesh,
Even as a malady may be, while this thing
Is health and growth, and growing draws all life,
All goodness, wisdom for its nutriment.
Till it become a vision paradisic,
And a ladder of fire for climbing, from its topmost
Rung a place for stepping into heaven. . . .

This I have known, but had not. Nor have I
Stood coolly off and seen the woman, used
Her blood upon my palette. No, but heaven
Commanded my strength's use to abort and slay
What grew within me, while I saw the blood
Of love untimely ripped, as 'twere a child
Killed i' the womb, a harpy or an angel
With my own blood stained.

As a virgin shamed
By the swelling life unlicensed needles it,
But empties not her womb of some last shred
Of flesh which fouls the alleys of her body,

And fills her wholesome nerves with poisoned sleep,
And weakness to the last of life, so I
For some shame not unlike, some need of life
To rid me of this life I had conceived
Did up and choke it too, and thence begot
A fever and a fixed debility
For killing that begot.

Now you see that I
Have not grown from a central dream, but grown
Despite a wound, and over the wound and used
My flesh to heal my flesh. My love's a fever
Which longed for that which nursed the malady,
And fed on that which still preserved the ill,
The uncertain, sickly appetite to please.
My reason, the physician to my love,
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept
Has left me. And as reason is past care
I am past cure, with ever more unrest
Made frantic-mad, my thoughts as madmen's are,
And my discourse at random from the truth,
Not knowing what she is, who swore her fair,
And thought her bright, who is as black as hell
And dark as night.

But list, good gentlemen,
This love I speak of is not as a cloak,
Which one may put away to wear a coat,
And doff that for a jacket, like the loves
We men are wont to have as loves or wives.
She is the very one, the soul of souls,
And when you put her on you put on light,
Or wear the robe of Nessus, poisonous fire,
Which if you tear away you tear your life,
And if you wear you fall to ashes. So
'Tis not her bed-vow broke, I have broke mine,
That ruins me; 'tis honest faith quite lost,
And broken hope that we could find each other,
And that mean more to me and less to her.
'Tis that she could take all of me and leave me

Without a sense of loss, without a tear,
And make me fool and perjured for the oath
That swore her fair and true. I feel myself
As like a virgin who her body gives
For love of one whose love she dreams is hers,
But wakes to find herself a toy of blood,
And dupe of prodigal breath, abandoned quite
For other conquests. For I gave myself,
And shrink for thought thereof, and for the loss
Of myself never to myself restored.
The urtication of this shame made plays
And sonnets, as you'll find behind all deeds
That mount to greatness, anger, hate, disgust,
But, better, love.

To hell with punks and wenches,
Drabs, mopsies, doxies, minxes, trulls and queans,
Rips, harridans and strumpets, pieces, jades.
And likewise to the eternal bonfire lechers,
All rakehells, satyrs, goats and placket fumblers,
Gibs, breakers-in-at-catch-doors, thunder tubes.
I think I have a fever—hell and furies!
Or else this ale grows hotter i' the mouth.
Ben, if I die before you, let me waste
Richly and freely in the good brown earth,
Untrumpeted and by no bust marked out.
What good, Ben Jonson, if the world could see
What face was mine, who wrote these plays and sonnets
Life, you have hurt me. Since Death has a veil
I take the veil and hide, and like great Cæsar
Who drew his toga round him, I depart.

Good friends, let's to the fields—I have a fever.
After a little walk, and by your pardon,
I think I'll sleep. There is no sweeter thing,
Nor fate more blessed than to sleep. Here, world,
I pass you like an orange to a child:
I can no more with you. Do what you will.
What should my care be when I have no power
To save, guide, mould you? Naughty world, you need me

As little as I need you: go your way!
Tyrants shall rise and slaughter fill the earth,
But I shall sleep. In wars and wars and wars
The ever-replenished youth of earth shall shriek
And clap their gushing wounds—but I shall sleep,
Nor earthly thunder wake me, when the cannon
Shall shake the throne of Tartarus. Orators
Shall fulmine over London or America
Of rights eternal, parchments, sacred charters,
And cut each others' throats when reason fails—
But I shall sleep. This globe may last and breed
The race of men till Time cries out "How long?"
But I shall sleep ten thousand thousand years,
I am a dream, Ben, out of a blessed sleep—
Let's walk and hear the lark.

FRONT THE AGES WITH A SMILE

How did the sculptor, Voltaire, keep you quiet and posed
In an arm chair, just think, at your busiest age we are told,
Being better than seventy? How did he manage to stay you
From hopping through Europe for long enough time for his work,
Which shows you in marble, the look and the smile and the nose,
The filleted brow very bald, the thin little hands,
The posture pontifical, face imperturbable, smile so serene.
How did the sculptor detain you, you ever so restless,
You ever so driven by princes and priests? So I stand here
Enwrapped of this face of you, frail little frame of you,
And think of your work—how nothing could balk you,
Or quench you or damp you. How you twisted and turned,
Emerged from the fingers of malice, emerged with a laugh,
Kept Europe in laughter, in turmoil, in fear
For your eighty-four years!

And they say of you still
You were light and a mocker! You should have been solemn,
And argued with monkeys and swine, speaking truthfully always.

Nay, truthful with whom, to what end? With a breed such as lived
In your day and your place? It was never their due!
Truth for the truthful and true, and a lie for the liar if need be—
A board out of plumb for a place out of plumb, for the hypocrite flashes
Of lightning or rods red hot for thrusting in tortuous places.
Well, this was your way, you lived out the genius God gave you.
And they hated you for it, hunted you all over Europe—
Why should they not hate you? Why should you not follow your light?
But wherever they drove you, you climbed to a place more satiric.
Did France bar her door? Geneva remained—good enough!
Les Delices close to some several cantons, you know.
Would they lay hands upon you? I fancy you laughing,
You stand at your door and step into Vaud by one path;
You stand at your door and step by another to France—
Such safe jurisdictions, in truth, as the Illinois rowdies
Step from county to county ahead of the frustrate policeman,
And here you have printers to print what you write and a house
For the acting of plays, La Pucelle, Orphelin.
O busy Voltaire, never resting. . . .

So England conservative, England of Southey and Burke,
The fox-hunting squires, the England of Church and of State,
The England half mule and half ox, writes you down, O Voltaire:
The quack grass of popery flourished in France, you essayed
To plow up the tangle, and harrow the roots from the soil.
It took a good plowman to plow it, a plowman of laughter,
A plowman who laughed when the plow struck the root, and your breast
Was thrown on the handles.

And yet to this day, O Voltaire,
They charge you with levity, soffing, when all that you did
Was to plow up the quack grass, and turn up the roots to the sun,

And let the sun kill them. For laughter is sunlight,
And nothing of worth or of truth needs to fear it.

But listen:
The strength of a nation is mind, I will grant you, and still
But give it a tongue read and spoken more greatly than others,
That nation can judge true or false and the judgment abides.
The judgment in English condemns you, where is there a judgment
To save you from this? Is it German, or Russian, or French?

Did you give up three years of your life
To wipe out the sentence that burned the wracked body of Calas?
Did you help the oppressed Montbailli and Lally, O well,
Six lines in an article written in English are plenty
To weigh what you did, put it by with a generous gesture,
Give the minds of the student your measure, impress them
Forever that all of this sacrific, service was noble,
But done with mixed motives, the fruits of your meddlesome nature,
Your hatred of churches and priests. Six lines are the record
Of all of these years of hard plowing in quack grass, while batting
At poisonous flies and stepping on poisonous snakes. . . .

How well did you know that life to a genius, a god,
Is naught but a farce! How well did you look with those eyes,
As black as a beetle's through all the ridiculous show:
Ridiculous war, and ridiculous strife, and ridiculous pomp.
Ridiculous dignity, riches, rituals, reasons and creeds.
Ridiculous guesses at what the great Silence is saying.
Ridiculous systems wound over the earth like a snake
Devouring the children of Fear! Ridiculous customs,
Ridiculous judgments and laws, philosophies, worships.
You saw through and laughed at—you saw above all
That a soul must make end with a groan, or a curse, or a laugh.

So you smiled till the lines of your mouth
A crescent became with dimples for horns, so expressing
To centuries after who see you in marble: Behold me,
I lived, I loved, I laughed, I toiled without ceasing
Through eighty-four years for realities—O let them pass,
Let life go by. Would you rise over death like a god?
Front the ages with a smile!

CELSUS AT HADRIAN'S VILLA

This is the place, my friend Aristo. Here
We sit and muse on the state of the world. Alas!
What are we coming to?

The tufa walls
Inlaid with yellow lichens look like bronze
Gold filagreed. And through those rifts and breaks
There are the trunks of ilex, gnarled and dark.
Look! Nature mocks us. Hadrian is asleep
These nearly hundred years. Does cyclamen
Crimson about these walls grow less profuse?
Or these anemones laugh less to the sun?
Or bramble, honeysuckle, bougainvillea
Desert the gardens of the emperor?
The merle and golden-crested wrens build nests,
Sing the hymenal song! But man, poor man,
Forsakes his triumphs, work, his palaces.
And barbarous weeds sprout over them and creep,
And choke his wisdom and his art.

Let's sit
Here in this colonnade. Philosophers
From Rome and Athens, Alexandria,
From mystic India, walked this colonnade,
And let the mind run free. It is no more,
Unless we fight the human weeds that spring
Under the rains that darken Rome. Let's up
With hoes and root them.

Here's cat-brier—chop!
Cat-brier, Christian meekness, fair to view—
But how it stinks! And briars: pain and loss
For ecstasy and gain beyond—I chop!
Chop here, Aristo, get your friends to chop,
Lest all the world be given up to weeds,
As Hadrian's Villa is about to be.
Rome soon will stretch her templed neck to breathe
Above the thorns, the hyssop. Even now
The state is crumbling with the heresy
That Rome should not be reverenced and saved,
But every soul saved. The Imperial City,
To which each Roman is a servitor,
Put by for doctrine making every heart
Worthy of saving from the wreck of life—
I chop this weed. And for the soul of Rome,
The lazar soul, the slave, the fuller, cobbler,
The fool, the God-forsaken and the child . . .
What if Rome fall? The City of God remains
Eternal in the Heavens! Yes, but Earth,
Where is thy city, if it be not Rome?
Destroy your Romans, Hadrians, what is left?
Itinerant exorcists and prophets, idlers,
And sacred beggars, leper lips that curse
Rome and her beauty! These the citizens
Of the City of God! What will that city be?
Themselves externalized, as Rome has flowered
From Roman minds; but never a Hadrian Villa
In the City of God, never from scowls and sores!
No! You shall have a world of trade and lies,
Of itching and denials, for a world
Of freedom and expression, wine and song.
These huckstering Jews are planting in our Rome
The faith that they persuaded God to kill
His Son to save them. And a huckstering
Will taint the flesh of all who eat this god.
But yet how they will rub their palms and coo
And ape a meekness. Here! Aristo, chop! . . .

But just so long as stones remain in place
Of Hadrian's Villa, eyes will look upon them
And sense the mind of Rome, and what it was:
That eyes were made for seeing, ears for hearing,
Hands made to touch, tongues made to taste, minds made
To think, imagine, love given to indulge
For rapture. There's no law of heaven or earth
That trims eyes, ears, the senses,
Of use; but all were made to leaf and bloom
The idea of the eye, the ear, the hand.
And only reason with regard for health
Of eyes, ears, hands, may guide and say: how far. . . .
See now what Hadrian's mind created here:—
A tragic theatre, a comic theatre.
What for? For eyes' sake, for exploring life.
Katharsis? Yes. But use? No use to him
Who thinks life sin, the world's end near, for Jews
Who like the frogs in marshes croaking, say:
"For our sakes was the world created, we
Alone are chosen of God." No use for him
Who sees enough of suffering in life
Without its mimicry; sees not the art
Of shooting light between the mystery
Of human fate, and waking sympathy
Through understanding. Christian weeds I chop,
Whose roots begin to sap the tragic roots
Of Sophocles.

But I say eyes may see:
And if I wish to watch the lions fight
What interdicts me, and what reason for it?
Now look how Hadrian's mind puts into flower:
A temple for Greek books, and one for Latin;
And there's the stadium, and there's the baths.
These Christians frown the bath. If I make out
Jesus may come today, and wherefore wash?
Besides the naked bathers cling and kiss
Within the tepidarium at times, and hence
Out with all bathing!

There's the palace too
Which o'ertops Nero's Golden House, they say.
And what guest chambers here! The laughing soul
Of Hadrian glows amid his friends. What's best
In life, Aristo? Why, when the soul is free,
From business, traffic, grasping, thought of self,
The aches of the day, and being freed shines forth
As star companions star, in smiles and words
Of praise, affection. Hadrian loves the faith
Of happiness, and lets his guests fare free,
Wander eight miles of garden, enter vales
Of Tempe, watch a mimic Peneus
Flow by; encounter fauns amid the brakes;
Surprise Bacchantes sleeping; hear from hills
A chorus of Euripides soothe their souls
With dreams before Faustina's sculptured face,
Or Antinous, Apollo, Venus; bathe
Their glowing bodies in the pools; partake
Of food or wine, gifts of the gods. Such life
Is passing, soon will pass. Aurelius
Lies under thought, which thrived before the day
Of Paul for all of that, the folly sees not
Of slaying Christians, while himself is teaching
The Christian doctrine! Ugliness, denial,
Self-laceration, beggary, are older
Than Jesus—and I chop!

But let the world
Submit to weeds, in time what will you have?
Not Hadrian's Villa, but a villa walled,
Walls spiked and guarded, and a house of walls
Empty of sculpture, where a miser-man,
Guarding his gold, a lone man eating bread
And milk, rules realms and countries from the book
Of Enoch, Exodus, the Septuagint,
And these purported writings of one Paul;
And who has made his heart a granary
For seed of faith and trade. This seed I chop!
For then your world lies flatter than the land
Of that campagna, made a marsh for frogs,

Dull grass and feculent roots, as it would lie
If once invaders smashed the aqueducts
And drowned our lovely plain!

You see, my friend
Why I fight back the weeds. This is not all,
For I know what engenders Christian faith:
Man dreams he can be saved, but saved from what?
Sin? What is sin? Age? What can save from age,
What keep the spring of youth, its rosy flesh,
Its spirit never tiring, hope undarkened,
Its courage without fears, long dreams and days?
Why nothing! All's illusion that holds forth
A medicine for wrinkles, shrunken arms.
Therefore what saves from death? Does Jesus save?
Does Jesus ease a soul's pain, cure a loss
Save as these devotees may soothe their hearts
With prospects of to-morrow, or of heaven?
No! good Aristo, all this Roman realm,
Washed by this sea, for centuries has been
As fertile as the valley of the Nile
For seed of this salvation dream, the seed
Of Mithra and Osiris, Krishna, Buddha,
Adonis, Tammuz, Dionysus, Attis.
What is this seed of Jesus? Nothing new:
The virgin birth? That's old as human dreams.
There's Dionysus born of Semele,
A virgin, and of Zeus; great Dionysus
The resurrection of the year, the mad,
Intoxicating power of nature, wine.
There is a myth that Jesus at a feast
Turned water into wine, a Bacchic feat.
One myth blends in another like mosaics
Of microscopic jewels. I go on.
Zeus fathers many sons of virgins born,
Is not content with one. He takes Danæ
And Perseus is the fruit, who slays the Gorgons
And saves Andromeda, the human soul.
Devaki is a virgin, weds Vishnu,
And Krishna comes. A virgin is the mother

Of Buddha. Horus springs from virgin Isis,
Our Lady, Queen of Heaven, Star of the Sea,
Mother of God, so called for centuries
Before the days of Mary. Neith, the virgin,
Was mother of Osiris. Mithra's born
Of a virgin mother.

This is what I mean
By fertile soil of Egypt, Persia, Greece,
That crops the seed of Jesus. Is this all?
All saviors tally fully. All were born
In caves or stables, chambers under ground;
All labored for the welfare of the race;
All were light bringers, healers, mediators
Between the gods and men. All fell in death,
Descended to the underworld. All rose
To strive for men in heaven; all created
Communions, churches, rites of water, wine,
Last suppers, brought the entheos, spilt their blood;
God, Krishna, Dionysus, Hercules.
And as for that Tammuz was crucified,
Prometheus was nailed and chained.

You know!
These from the mysteries of the heart, from life;—
Death of the year, birth of the year, the hope
That shines amid the mist of doubts and days;
The dream that says if nature leave the grave
Of winter, what's the life of man, to be
Shut from the law that wakes the fallen seed?
If God renew the wine, I drink the juice
Of the grape and live! If God be in the bull,
And must be, life is life, and all is life
Of one divinity, I drink the blood,
I wash therein, cleanse sin, and celebrate
A ritual of salvation, endless life! . . .
I trace all Krishnas, Mithras in this god,
Hope's latest dream.

What's needed but a flame
That draws these older flames? What but a man
Of inspiration, labor, sacrifice,
A poet, hater of the scurvy times,
Killed for his blasting eyes, accusing tongue,
To have your Christos? Jesus lived. Why not?
'Tis credible; killed by the Jews, why not?
And made a sacrifice for many—doctrine
World old and wide. From Babylon the Jews
Brought Hammurabi, brought Sacæa too,
A ritual for prisoners doomed to die,
By which they would be decked in kingly robes,
Stripped, scourged and hanged even as we have done
At Saturnalia. How else "King of the Jews,"
Except by ancient custom? Think, Aristo,
Would great Tiberius suffer such sedition
Except as drama and in mockery?
Aristo, if this Jesus were the god
As Mithra, Dionysus are, 'twere well
With Rome and Hadrian's Villa. Understand
If these infatuate zealots, Jews would keep
Their god, belief, but still conform to Rome,
Rome's gods, the empire reverence, who would care?
No Roman! No one! But to hear these prophets
Cry through our cities, camps: to everlasting
Flames commit our cities and our lands,
And curse us out of Jewish scriptures, draw
The imprecations of the epileptic
Paul upon us, this I fight, I chop!
I stand with sword against the enervation
Of private judgment, that the common man
Is heaven's prize. This demos mania
And ruin of the empire I oppose.
And when these plagues of Christians grow too loud,
And Rome arouses, wants the lions fed,
Or crosses painted with a little red,
I go to see. These anarch colleges,
Illicit schools, called churches, quiet down
When in the circus Christian bones are crunched. . . .

Now for my consolation if Rome fall;
If lowliness and other worldliness;
If meekness, sacrifice; if life's denial;
If all this creed out of inverted thought,
Shame for the lust of life, the Orient's
Sick perfume, drugs, if all of this be taken
Into the body of Rome, the world; the poison
Of Jesus swallowed—this my consolation:
Life, being God, is stronger than God's Son;
Life will digest it, and evacuate
What cannot be digested, and retain
What can be used. Another Rome will rise
If our Rome fall. Let's go up there, a while,
And watch the waterfalls, and have some wine.

AT SAGAMORE HILL

All things proceed as though the stage were set
For acts arranged. I have not learned the part,
The day enacts itself. I take the tube,
Find daylight at Jamaica, know the place
Through some rehearsal, all the country know
Which glides along the window, is not seen
For definite memory. At Oyster Bay
A taxi stands in readiness; in a trice
We circle strips of water, slopes of hills,
Climb where a granite wall supports a hill,
A mass of blossoms, ripening berries, too,
And enter at a gate, go up a drive,
Shadowed by larches, cedars, silver willows.
This taxi just ahead is in the play,
Is here in life as I had seen it in
The crystal of prevision, reaches first
The porte cochere. This moment from the door
Comes Roosevelt, and greets the man who leaves
The taxi just ahead, then waits for me,
Puts a strong hand that softens into mine,
And says, O, this is bully!

We go in.
He leaves my antecessor in a room,
Somewhere along the hall, and comes to me,
Who wait him in the roomy library.
How are those lovely daughters? Oh, by George!
I thought I might forget their names, I know—
It's Madeline and Marcia. Yes, you know
Corinne adores the picture which you sent
Of Madeline—your boy, too? In the war!
That's bully—tea is coming—we must talk.
I have five hundred things to ask you—set
The tea things on this table, Anna—now,
Do you take sugar, lemon? O, you smoke!
I'll give you a cigar.

The talk begins.
He's dressed in canvas khaki, flannel shirt,
Laced boots for farming, chopping trees, perhaps;
A stocky frame, curtains of skin on cheeks,
Drained slightly of their fat; gash in the neck,
Where pus was emptied lately; one eye dim,
And growing dimmer; almost blind in that.
And when he walks he rolls a little like
A man whose youth is fading, like a cart
That rolls when springs are old. He is a moose,
Scarred, battered from the hunters, thickets, stones;
Some finest tips of antlers broken off;
And eyes where images of ancient things
Flit back and forth across them, keeping still
A certain slumberous indifference,
Or wisdom, it may be.

But then the talk!
Bronze dolphins in a fountain cannot spout
More streams at once: Of course the war, the emperor,
America in the war, his sons in France,
The dangers, separation, let them go!
The fate has been appointed—to our task,
Live full our lives with duty, go to sleep!
For I say, he exclaims, the man who fears

To die should not be born, nor left to live.
It's Celtic poetry, free verse. He says:
You nobly celebrate in your Spoon River
The pioneers, the soldiers of the past,
Why do you flout our Philippine adventure?
No difference, Colonel, in the stock, the difference
Lies in the causes. Well, another stream:
Mark Hanna, Quay and others. What I hate,
He says to me, is the Pharisee—I can stand
All other men. And you will find the men
So much maligned had gentle qualities,
And noble dreams. Poor Quay, he loved the Indians,
Sent for me when he lay there dying, said,
Look after such a tribe when I am dead.
I want to crawl upon a sunny rock
And die there like a wolf. Did he say that,
Colonel, to you? Yes! and you know, a man
Who says a thing like that has in his soul
An orb of light to flash that meaning forth
Of heroism, nature.

Time goes on,
The play is staged, must end; my taxi comes
In half an hour or so. Before it comes,
Let's walk about the farm and see my corn.
A fellow on the porch is warming heels
As we go by. I'll see him when you go,
The Colonel says.

The rail fence by the corn
Is good to lean on as we stand and talk
Of farming, cattle, country life. We turn,
Sit for some moments in a garden house
On which a rose vine clambers all in bloom,
And from this hilly place look at the strips
Of water from the bay a mile beyond,
Below some several terraces of hills
Where firs and pines are growing. This resembles
A scene in Milton that I've read. He knows,
Catches the reminiscence, quotes the lines and then

Something of country silence, look of grass
Where the wind stirs it, mystical little breaths
Coming between the roses; something, too,
In Vulcan's figure; he is Vulcan, too,
Deprived his shop, great bellows, hammer, anvil,
Sitting so quietly beside me, hands
Spread over knees; something of these evokes
A pathos, and immediately in key
With all of this he says: I have achieved
By labor, concentration, not at all
By gifts or genius, being commonplace
In all my faculties.

Not all, I say.
One faculty is not, your over-mind,
Eyed front and back to see all faculties,
Govern and watch them. If we let you state
Your case against you, timid born, you say,
Becoming brave; asthmatic, growing strong;
No marksman, yet becoming skilled with guns;
No gift of speech, yet winning golden speech;
No gift of writing, writing books, no less
Of our America to thrill and live—
If, as I say, we let you state your case
Against you as you do, there yet remains
This over-mind, and that is what—a gift
Of genius or of what? By George, he says,
What are you, a theosophist? I don't know.
I know some men achieve a single thing,
Like courage, charity, in this incarnation;
You have achieved some twenty things. I think
That this is going some for a man whose gifts
Are commonplace and nothing else.

We rise
And saunter toward the house—and there's the man
Still warming heels; my taxi too, has come.
We are to meet next Wednesday in New York
And finish up some subjects—he has thoughts
How I can help America, if I drop

This line or that a little, all in all.
But something happens; I have met a loss;
Would see no one, and write him I am off.
And on that Wednesday flashes from the war
Say Quentin has been killed: we had not met
If I had stayed to meet him.

So, good-by
Upon the lawn at Sagamore was good-by!
Master of Properties, you stage the scene
And let us speak and pass into the wings!
One thing was fitting—dying in your sleep—
A touch of Nature, Colonel, you who loved
And were beloved of Nature, felt her hand
Upon your brow at last to give to you
A bit of sleep, and after sleep, perhaps,
Rest and rejuvenation, you will wake
To newer labors, fresher victories
Over those faculties not disciplined
As you desired them in these sixty years.

HIP LUNG *ON* YUAN CHANG

You like store? You like Chinese tea? You like me?
You like silk, fan, screen, dragon, pearl chair, jade;
You like Chinese tobacco, picture, Buddha too,
Well, as Geesu Klist? All light Lee,
You Chinaman, maybe. I like Chicago too.
I like you, and Hinky Dink, lots I like.
Good city here, much friends. I make some money,
Go back to China sometime. Keep store here,
Come back to store.

China old country, vely old country,
Wise country, much wise men long time ago.
Here book Shï-king, about long time,
More'n tree tousand year ago. Here Lun Yü book
About Confucius, live long time ago, much time
Before live Geesu; taught love one another,

Be good to good men; bad men be fair to; speak truth.
Where sun and moon shine, all place, love and honor
Come to Confucius, brother of God.

More yet:
Lao Tzu great man, too, who say be good
To bad men; Chinamen read; close book and speak
What book says; to be wise, Chinese learn to speak
What book say closed, on shelf, burned up, or lost.
Chicago good town, Amelika good country, England,
Europe good country too, but China good country,
Wise long time ago, when no Amelika was,
No town in England, and no book in Europe,
Two tousand year before Geesu Kliste came.
Some say Buddha greater than Kliste,
Chinese say Confucious greater than Buddha.
I say all gods; let alone—what you care?
Kill Chinaman if you wish, golden rule is golden rule
In Pekin, or Jerusalem.

Geesu Kliste people,
Salvation Army come and say: "Hip Lung,
Be saved, love Geesu Kliste, be baptized."
I know the Four Books, I say the Four Books
And never look; but when I say Confucius
Taught golden rule and love, they say, not clear
Like Geesu Kliste, Confucius heathen man,
Not good like Geesu Kliste. All light! All light!
I sing about the Dragon Boats, go round
The store till they go on. They no read
The Four Books, no care. Sometime I ask
Why China not hear about Geesu Kliste for years.
Why? Eh? We hear of Buddha, why
No hear of Kliste?

Kliste people say
Tree hundred year they know Kliste comin'—
China no hear. China hear 'bout Buddha
Tree hundred year after Buddha die.
Ming Ti, great king, sent down to India

To hear 'bout God Buddha.
China no hear of Kliste then . . .
Tousand year after God Buddha die,
Great man come to China, Fa Hsien.
Kliste dead now four hundred year,
But China no hear. Why?
Fa Hsien go to India to get books about Buddha.
Go trou Gobi desert—no birds, tigers,
But much dragons and devils.
Fa Hsien go to Benares, Buddha, Gaya, Ceylon,
Come back with books about light way;
See light, hope light, speak light,
Do light, live light, try light; light mind,
Light happiness. And China hear
And love Buddha! . . .

Kliste dead four hundred year—
Alle time much people in China, temples, cities,
Much books, many wise men.
And Kliste dead now six hundred year,
And China no hear. Kliste!
Same time god Buddha grow up in China.

Kliste dead more'n six hundred year,
And Arabs come from Medina to Canton,
Tell about prophet of God Muhammed—Allah!
But no Kliste much.
Next year, Kliste dead now 'bout 630 year.
Salvation Army come from Persia, and China hear
'Bout Kliste, too late; god Buddha worshipped now
By much China people.

Year before Salvation Army from Persia
Great man come again: Yuan Chang.
He go to India to get books
'Bout god Buddha, and see holy place.
You no hear 'bout Yuan Chang? No?
Greek men great men, and Cheeser,
Napoleon great men and popes, and Roosevelt—
All light! Yuan Chang great man too.

HIP LUNG *ON* YUAN CHANG

Like Fa Hsien he go trou Gobi desert,
Fight robbers, dragons; no water, no food;
See much broken cities;
Go from Samarkand to Nepal;
Gone fourteen year;
Come back to Singor.
Tai-tsung emperor now,
And vely glad to see Yuan Chang,
Who bring tousands of books by god Buddha,
Gold, silver, crystal images of god Buddha,
And bones of god Buddha, hair, nails, leaves of Bo tree,
All like that. Where is Kliste now? I don't know.
China hear not much. . . .

Tai-tsung great emperor! Know much too!
Know about Allah, know about Buddha,
Know about Kliste, and Salvation Army.
But Tai-tsung no give a damn,
Only say to Yuan Chang:
Write Buddha books in China language.
And write Lao Tzu in Indian language.
Trade gods that way! We no lose.
Maybe India see more in Lao Tzu
Than China, who knows? All time
Kliste dead more'n six hundred year,
And nobody say much 'bout Kliste,
And China goin' to hell, as Salvation Army say,
Alle time.

Kliste dead six hundred year,
Salvation Army come to England,
And baptize everybody; but China no hear.
Kliste dead eighteen hundred year,
England come to China for Kliste and opium—
Make nice dreams—what you care
'Bout Buddha, Kliste—Smoke? Eh?

ELIZABETH TO MONSIEUR D——

I pace the rooms and wait for John's return.
My heart beats all too fast, I feel a pain
Around my heart, my hands grow cold, I burn
Through neck and cheeks. And thus I live in vain.
John comes at last and says, "There is no mail,
No letter for you." And with whirling brain
I turn away in silence, growing pale,
And whisper to myself: to be resigned
To wretchedness perhaps is to prevail
O'er wretchedness and win a peace of mind.
To love you so, to thirst for you, to pay
For outward calm with inner storms confined,
To lie awake by night and spend the day
In restless thoughts, is life too hard to bear.
I see you in my troubled dreams alway,
You face me with a grave and haughty air,
Serene, incensed against me who intrude
An interest which you have no heart to share.
Forgive me then my sorrow's servitude,
To write to you my suffering will ease,
And fill the aching of my solitude.
I have gone forth to Nature to find peace:
The woods are filled with purple lupine now,
Small yellow asters, phlox, and cramoisies
Of columbine and roses, vine and bough.
The wild grape and the cherry haunt the dunes
With odors sweet as love. To cool my brow
I walk the heights upon these afternoons
And watch the blue waste of the sky's descent.
And yesterday where golden light festoons
With flickering scorcery the way we went,
'Twixt sprays of beech and sassafras I stole,
Till once again at the hill's top half-spent
I saw the shore dunes and the waters roll.
We climbed it once together—it was there
The Bacchic madness came into your soul
To take me in your arms. And now I bear
Your coldness, your reproaches, you who call

ELIZABETH TO MONSIEUR D——.

My longing and my spiritual despair
A mere neurosis, or hysterical
Outcropping to be conquered. It was wrong
To take me in your arms, and then when all
Was not yours then to tell me to be strong,
And urge your marriage vows now I have thought
The problem of my love through. I belong
To you, Monsieur; whatever grief is wrought
Of body or of soul to satisfy
The flame is better, and is far less fraught
With mad regret than it can be to lie
In restless torture. O my friend, withdraw
Your friendship from me never, lest I die!
Yes, I could live and work if I foresaw
Your friendship mine and letters by your hand
Arriving in this lonely place to thaw
The ice around my heart's flame. Understand
From those I love but little love I need:
Crumbs from your feast you scarce can countermand,
And crumbs are all I ask, and just the meed
Of friendly interest. I abase my pride.
The strong can suffer silently and bleed
As long as strength lasts, keep the blood inside,
Until one weakens when it spurts and drips.
And Pride turns Nature, careless now to hide
The inner bleeding bubbling at the lips.
I write you this without regret or shame.
My strength has left me in the blue eclipse
Of agony. Monsieur, I take the blame,
If any come, of fanning dangerously
The spark that brightened once and would be flame—
Is that not true? Or do you say to me:
"You are no more my pupil, I retrench
"The memory of things that cease to be,
"And go my way with teaching young girls French,
"As I taught you. Two years have passed since then.
"What is this thought that time has failed to quench?
"You who are laureled in the world of men,
"A genius risen like a morning star,
"Does not that glory fill you?" Yet again

I answer you one's genius burns afar
In useless splendor if it warm no cheek,
Make bright no eye, lead on no darkling spar—
Genius is love, is freedom, it must speak,
Work out its fate from egocentric life;
It is more swift than other feet to seek
Its ruin with its hope, or take the knife
More willingly to breast than those who sink
In involuted growth. To be your wife
I do not dream, I only wish to drink
The cup with you and break the bread with you,
To feel thereby our lives are one and think
We are one creed and one communion, new
In spirit, born anew, that I may have
An altar for my genius, something true
And near in flesh to triumph for, or brave
The world or evil for. Genius is love.
It cannot bear itself alone to save;
It must another rescue, it must prove
Its growing strength in ministry. Monsieur,
Bruise not my soul by ignorance hereof.
My reverend father thinks my thoughts are pure—
If he should read this! But if you dismiss
This letter with a smile and say her cure
Is the reaction of forbidden bliss,
It is most true, but you would not degrade
My love for you with that analysis,
And that alone. For surely God who made
Our souls and bodies so meant we should rise
Through their desires, and does God pervade
This glowing mass of life, these starry skies
With other power? Now scorn me, if you will.
The unburdened heart has tamed its agonies.

THEY'D NEVER KNOW ME NOW

Let's sit here very quiet, self-controlled,
Talk quietly, under this glorious tree,
The internes are too far away to hear.
They will stand there if we are calm.

You look
Much better than you did. And as for me,
Since I tried leaping from my window, I
Seem on the mend, sleep better, do not feel
So much like running, flying from the fears
As I did three weeks since. Here is my tale:

My first step in this world was as a soldier,
Turned seventeen and off to free the Cubans.
I landed at Matanzas, served my time.
Oh Liberty! Oh! struggles to make free
All peoples, everywhere! And when I saw
The American republic move to strike
The chains of tyranny, I said: I die
For such a cause, or live to see it won—
How glorious! My youthful mind was full
Of Byron, Shelley, Paine, and many more—
And when I saw my republic go to war,
Just as a good Samaritan, I said,
This is my hour, I'm on the pinnacle,
Life is divine at last.

But on a sudden
A north wind froze my waters, caught my stars
To points of vision which before had been
Mixed in the fluent time. We up and stole
The Philippines, spit on our sacred charter,
Turned all the thing to guts, until I heard
Their growl alone which I thought spirit voices
When we had warred for Cuba! 'Twas enough;
What was my country? Just a mass of slickers
Talking philanthrophy and five per cent,
A pious, blundering booby lodged at last
In a great cæcum mouthing Destiny,
God, with a leader just an actor-man,
Clean shaven, shifty, shallow, whored upon
By mercantilists and their butcher creed.
I mean McKinley, Hanna. Write it down:
They barbarized our Grecian temple, placed
Cheap colored windows in its marble walls—
May history be their hell.

But as for me,
They talked of God so much, I said at last
I'll learn all they can teach concerning God.
This restless soldier spirit led me on,
And just because I sensed the faithless age,
Loveless and purposeless except for gold,
The adventurer in me began to crop.
Oh yes, the Cuban business started me.
And so I went to college to prepare
For the ministry, as they thought, go through the course
Called theological, saying for the first:
"They'd never know me now."

I see at last
I am not one but many minds at once,
And many personalities. As a boy
I took the color of the leaves or wall
Where I was resting, climbing. If in truth
I lived three months with an uncle, then they said
You look just like your uncle. When I worked
Under a lawyer's tutelage, they said:
How much your face resembles his. I knew
My face and voice and gestures simulated
Those I admired or lived with. But besides
I took a certain pleasure, impish, maybe,
In egging on, agreeing with the souls
Whom I sought out; I used to tell my uncle,
A man of firmest piety, what I heard
Of blasphemy about the village, just
To hear him deprecate it, look with dark
And flashing eyes upon such sin, while I,
With serious face and earnest sympathy
With what he felt, was laughing in my sleeve.
Here is the germ then of my after life:
The faculty that harmonized my hue
Of spirit with the place, the person, while
Something in me, perhaps supremest self,
Stood quite aloof and smiled.

But, as I said,
When our Republic left its hill of vision,
Descended to the place of herding hogs,
This self of me, the adventurer, rose up
And led me forth to play with life, and first
To try theology, as I have said . . .
I was a wonder bred among the crew
Of quiet, gate-toothed, crook-nosed psychopaths,
The foul-breathed, thick-lipped onanists who filled
The Seminary, stared at me to see
How I learned Sanscrit, could defend and rout
The atheistic speculations. Well,
What I enjoyed most was to get a crowd
Of celibates and talk of chastity,
And get them in a glow, and say to them:
The mind is fortified by abstinence,
The spirit clarified and lifted up—
I got a thrill somehow. But all the time
I knew a girl named Ella. Oftentimes
Lying beside her I would shriek with laughter
And she would ask, what is the matter, John?
And I would say: I'm thinking of a song
I heard one time: "They'd never know me now."
And Ella said: If Dr. Simpson knew
That you were here with me, you'd take a fall
Out of the Seminary's second floor. . . .
But I went through and didn't fall. And thought
This is a way to live, I'll preach awhile,
And see what comes. I took a church and preached,
Was known as Smith the eloquent, the earnest.
But all the time I heard a voice that said:
"They'd never know me now." When I came in
The Sunday School and little children flocked
About my knees, and patient teachers looked
With white, pure faces at me, then that voice
"They'd never know me now" was in my ear. . . .

Well, to go on, a widow in my church
Young, beautiful and rich began to beat

Her wings around my flame, and on the Sunday
I preached about the rich young man, she came,
Invited me to dinner. We commenced,
Were married in six months. And to conserve
Her properties I studied law, at last
Was spending days with brokers, business men,
Began to tell her that my health was failing,
Saw doctors frequently to play the part.
And then she said: You must resign your charge,
Your health is breaking, dear. And I resigned
To spend the time in checking mortgages,
Collecting rents:—"They'd never know me now." . . .

We went the round of summer places, travel,
Saw Europe, China, India and the Isles.
Near Florence had a villa for a time,
Met people of all kinds, when I was forty
I had a thousand selves, but if I had
A self in truth it was submerged or scrawled
Like a palimpsest all over and so lost.
I didn't know myself, was anything
To every one, and everything to all.
I felt the walking age come on me now:
A polar bear in a terrible rhythm swings
His body back and forth behind the bars,
And I would walk in restlessness or think
Of other skies and places, teased and stung
By memories of my other selves, by wonder
About what may be happening here or there:
What are they doing now? What is she doing?
There were a dozen shes to wonder about,
And if you think of one you wish to see,
And dream she knows delight apart from you,
You simply thrill, the wings you lost revolve,
Like thumbs, vestigial stubs—but there you sit.
Thank God the aeroplane came on to help,
And wipe out distance, for you find at last
Distance is tragedy, terrifies the soul
With space which must be mastered by the soul.

And so I bought a hydroplane. Perhaps
Would be upon my lawn at sundown, holding
These children on my knees, a lovely picture!
Then as a fish darts out of darkened water
Into a water sun-lit, there would come
A thought—we'll say of Alice—in two hours
I'd be upon her little sleeping porch
Two hundred miles away, beneath the stars
Of middle summer, having killed that space,
And found the hour I wanted—hearing too
"They'd never know me now" sung in my ears.

And I remember when we were in Florence
My tribe had gone to Milan for some weeks,
And I was quite alone, too bored to live.
One listless afternoon who should come in?
My wife's friend Constance—but to tell the truth
More friend of mine than hers, for all my life
I seemed to have these secret understandings,
And was two persons to a twain who thought
They were the bond, whereas the bond existed
Between myself and one, and to the other
Was not so much as dreamed.

And Constance brought
A certain Countess with her. In a glance
We two, the Countess and myself, beheld
A flame that joined our hands. And in a week
The Countess took me on her yacht to Capri,
And round the Mediterranean. No one knew,
Not Constance, nor my wife, for I returned
Before she came from Milan.

Oh, that week!
That breeze that sung the portholes, waters blue
And stars at night and music; and the Countess
Whose voice was like a lute of gold, who lived,
Knew life, was unafraid. She heard me say
"They'd never know me now." And softly murmured

Smiling the while: "Il lupo cangia
Il pelo ma non il vizio,"
Adding, "Qual matto! Something yet remains
That makes you charming!" Oh, the feasts and wine,
The songs and poems, till at last too soon
We anchored in the bay of Naples. When
I saw Vesuvius, then I felt again
That sinking of the heart that I had known,
That sickness, strange nostalgia, from a boy,
Of which a word again. But now it was
Precursive of the end, the finished idyll.
The Countess took my hand, with misty eyes—
They let me off and rowed me to the dock,
I caught the train to Florence, magically
Before I had forgotten, seemed to be
Upon the yacht still, was in truth alone
Amid the silence of my dining room,
Supping alone—"They'd never know me now!"

Later I had the fever, was delirious
And saw myself receding, as if backing
Into a funnel toward the little end,
And growing smaller as the funnel narrowed,
Until I was so small I held myself
Within the palm's hand of my other self,
Laughed like a devil, scared the nurse to death,
Saying "They'd never know me now—just look!"
My wife too had the fever. I awoke
Out of this illness, found that she was gone,
Had died a week before and for a week
Had been entombed while I was raving—then.
If any real self of me ever was it came
Back to me then. I bowed my head and wept
And scanned my life back:

What was that in me
Which made me homesick from a boy right through
This life of mine, not for my home, for something,
Some place, some hand, some scene; which made me dread
All partings, overwhelmed me with a grief

For ended raptures, kept my brain too full
Of memories, never lost, that grew until
I lost myself, and seemed a thousand selves
Wandering through a thousand years, how restless!

Then mutterings shook our skies! Another war,
France, Germany and England. So it seemed
Best to return here to America.
I gathered up the children—all but one,
The boy eighteen escaped me, ran away
And joined the English army. Now I saw
One self of me repeated, that which went
To free the Cubans! Curse these freedom wars!
They shipped him off to India, soon he had
His fill of liberty. But I came back
And here I am. "They'd never know me now!"

For what is left of me, what ever was
To be peeled off to realest core? The soldier
Gone out of me entirely; long ago,
The dreamer of a better world; the self
That said I'm on the pinnacle, took arms
To free the Cubans; self of me that hungered
For pyramids and mountains, ancient streams,
Nile and the Ganges; self of me that turned
To be a father holding on his knees
A romping bevy; self of me that dreamed
One heart, one hand enough, oh, even the self
That dreamed there is a hand, a heart for me,
Who found in truth no solace in the wife,
But only a teasing, torturing recollection
That I had missed the one, or missed the many!

So I was in America again,
Had fled the war and plunged into the war:—
The waves roared yonder, but the shores were here
Where wreckage, putrid monsters were thrown up,
Corpses of ancient liberties and bones
Of treasured beauty; and I saw the Land
Don every despot weapon, as it did

When I fought for the Cubans, even worse.
They shipped my boy to Africa; in spite
Of censorship I pieced the picture out,
Knew what he suffered, how they took his faith
And dimmed its flame with ordure. Then came forth
That father self of me. I brooded on
His blue eyes, gentle ways, sat terrified
And tried to trace the days through and the years
When he had slipped from just a little boy
Into a stripling, soldier finally—
While I—what was I doing? Oh, my God,
Living these other selves, oblivious
That this boy was! I'd jump from soundest sleep
Thinking of him in Africa, and seized
With dreams that I must fly to him. O years
Wherein I lost that boy! How could I live
So many lives and not lose out of some,
Some precious thing? Well, then I broke at last,
They brought me here: "They'd never know me now."

THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT

(*From Domesday Book*)

Why don't they come to me to find the cause
Of Elenor Murray's death? The house is first;
That is the world, and Jack is God, you know;
The malt is linen, purple, wine and food,
The rats that get the malt are nobles, lords,
Those who had feudal dues and hunting rights,
And privileges, first nights, all the rest.
The cats are your Voltaires, Rousseaus; the dogs,
Your jailers, Louis, Fredericks and such.
And O, you blessed cow, you common people,
Whom maidens all forlorn attend and milk.
Here is your Elenor Murray who gives hands,
Brain, heart and spirit to the task of milking,
And straining milk that other lips may drink,
Revive and flourish, wedding, if she weds,

The tattered man in church, which is your priest
Shaven and shorn, and wakened with the sun
By the cock, theology, that keeps the house
Well timed and ruled for honor unto Jack,
Who must have order, rising on the hour,
And ceremony for his house.

If rats
Had never lived, or left the malt alone,
This girl had lived. Let's trace the story down:
We went to France to fight, we go to France
To get the origin of Elenor's death.
It's 1750, say, the malt of France
And Europe, too, is over-run by rats;
The nobles and the clergy own the land,
Exact the taxes, drink the luscious milk
Of the crumpled horns. But cats come slinking by,
Called Diderot, Voltaire, Rousseau. Now look!
Cat Diderot goes after war and taxes,
The slave trade, privilege, the merchant stomach.
In England, too, there is a sly grimalkin,
Who poisons rats with most malicious thoughts,
And bears the name of Adam—Adam Smith,
By Jack named Adam just to signify
His sinful nature. But the cat Voltaire
Says Adam never fell, that man is good,
An honest merchant better than a king,
And shaven priests are worse than parasites.
He rubs his glossy coat against the legs
Of Quakers, loving natures, loathes the trade
Of war, and runs with velvet feet across
The whole of Europe, scaring rats to death.
The cat Rousseau is instinct like a cat,
And purrs that man born free is still in chains
Here in this house that Jack built. Consequence?
There is such squeaking, running of the rats,
The cats in North America wake up
And drive the English rats out; then the dogs
Grow cautious of the cats, poor simple Louis
Convokes a French assembly to preserve

The malt against the rats and give the cow
Whose milk is growing blue and thin some malt.
And all at once rats, cats and dogs, the cow,
The shaven priest, the maiden all forlorn,
The tattered man, the cock, are in a hubbub
Of squeaking, caterwauling, barking, lowing,
With cock-a-doodles, curses, prayers and shrieks
Ascending from the melée. In a word,
You have a revolution.

All at once
A mastiff dog appears and barks: "Be still."
And in a way in France's room in the house
Brings order for a time. He grabs the fabric
Of the Holy Roman Empire, tears it up,
Sends for the shaven priest from Rome and bites
His shrunken calves; trots off to Jena where
He whips the Prussian dogs, but wakes them too
To breed and multiply, grow strong to fight
All other dogs in Jack's house, bite to death
The maidens all forlorn, like Elenor Murray.

This mastiff, otherwise Napoleon called,
Is downed at last by dogs from everywhere.
They're rid of him—but still the house of Jack
Is better than it was, the rats are thick,
But cats grow more abundant, malt is served
More generously to the cow. The Prussian dogs
Discover malt's the thing, also the cow
Must have her malt, or else the milk gives out.
But all the while the Prussian dogs grow strong,
Well taught and angered by Napoleon.
And some of them would set the house in order,
After the manner of America.
But many wish to fight, get larger rooms,
Then set the whole in order. At Sadowa
They whip the Austrian dogs, and once again
A mastiff comes, a Bismarck, builds a suite
From north to south, and forces Austria
To huddle in the kitchen, use the outhouse

Where Huns and Magyars, Bulgars and the rest
Keep Babel under Jack, who split their tongues
To make them hate each other and suspect,
Not understanding what the other says.
This very Babel was the cause of death
Of Elenor Murray, if I chose to stop
And go no further with the story.

Next
Our mastiff Bismarck thinks of Luneville,
And would avenge it, grabs the throat of France,
And downs her; at Versailles growls and carries
An emperor of Germany to the throne.
Then pants and wags his tail, and little dreams
A dachshund in an early day to come
Will drive him from the kennel and the bone
He loves to crunch and suck.

This dachshund is
In one foot crippled, rabies from his sires
Lies dormant in him, in a day of heat
Froth from his mouth will break, his eyes will roll
Like buttons made of pearl with glints of green.
Already he feels envy of the dogs
Who wear brass collars, bay the moon of Jack,
And roam at will about the house of Jack,
The English, plainer said. This envy takes
The form of zeal for country, so he trots
About the house, gets secrets for reforms
For Germany, would have his lesser dogs
All merchants, traders sleek and prosperous,
Achieve a noble breed to rule the house.
And so he puts his rooms in order, while
The other dogs look on with much concern
And growing fear.

The business of the house
In every room is over malt; the cow
Must be well fed for milk. And if you have
No feudal dues, outlandish taxes, still

The game of old goes on, has only changed
Its dominant form. Grimalkin Adam Smith
Spied all the rats, and all the tricks of rats,
Saw in his day the rats crawl hawser ropes
And get on ships, embark for Indias,
And get the malt; and now the merchant ships
For China bound, for Africa, for the Isles
Of farthest seas take rats, who slip aboard
And eat their fill before the patient cow,
Milked daily as before can lick her tongue
Against a mouthful of the precious stuff.
You have your eastern question, and your Congo.
France wants Morocco, gives to Germany
Possessions in the Congo for Morocco.
The dogs jump into China, even we
Take part and put the Boxers down, lay hands
Upon the Philippines, and Egypt falls
To England, all are building battleships.
The dachshund barking, he is crowded out,
Encircled, as he says, builds up the army,
And patriot cocks are crowing everywhere,
Until the house of Jack with snarls and growls,
The fuff, fuff, fuff of cats seem on the eve
Of pandemonium. The Germans think
The Slavs want Europe, and the Slavs are sure
The Germans want it, and it's all for malt.
Meantime the Balkan Babel leads to war.
The Slavic peoples do not like the rule
Of Austro-Hungary, but the latter found
No way except to rule the Slavs and rule
Southeastern Europe, being crowded out
By mastiff Bismarck. And again there's Jack
Who made confusion of the Balkan tongues.
And so the house awaits events that look
As if Jack willed them, anyway a thing
That may be put on Jack. It comes at last.
All have been armed for malt. A crazy man
Has armed himself and shoots a king to be,
The Archduke Francis, on the Serbian soil,
Then Austria moves on Serbia, Russia moves

To succor Serbia, France is pledged to help
The Russians, but our dachshund has a bond
With Austria, and rushes to her aid.
Then England must protect the channel, yes,
France must be saved—and here you have your war.

And now for Elenor Murray. Top of brain
Where ideals float like clouds, we owed to France
A debt, but had we paid it, if the dog,
The dachshund, mad at last, had left our ships
To freedom of the seas? Say what you will,
This England is the smartest thing in time,
Can never fall, be conquered while she keeps
That mind of hers, those eyes that see all things,
Spies or no spies, knows every secret hatched
In every corner of the house of Jack.
And with one language spoken by more souls
Than any tongue, leads minds by written words;
Writes treaties, compacts which forestall the sword,
And make it futile when it's drawn against her. . . .
You cuff your enemy at school or make
A naso-digital gesture, coming home
You fear your enemy, so walk beside
The gentle teacher; if your enemy
Throws clods at you, he hits the teacher. Well,
'Twas wise to hide munitions back of skirts,
And frocks of little children, most unwise
For Daschund William to destroy the skirts,
And frocks to sink munitions, since the wearers
Happened to be Americans. William fell
Jumping about his room and spilled the clock,
Raked off the mantel; broke his billikens,
His images of Jack by doing this.
For, seeing this, we rise; ten million youths
Take guns for war, and many Elenor Murrays
Swept out of placid places by the ripples
Cross seas to serve.

This girl was French in part,
In spirit was American. Look back:

Do you not see Voltaire lay hold of her,
Hands out of tombs and spirits, from the skies
Lead her to Europe? Trace the causes back
To Adam, or the dwellers of the lakes,
It is enough to see the souls that stirred
The Revolution of the French which drove
The ancient evils from the house of Jack.
It is enough to hope that from this war
The vestiges of feudal wrongs shall lie
In Jack's great dust-pan, swept therein and thrown
In garbage cans by maidens all forlorn,
The Fates we'll call them now, lame goddesses,
Hags halt, far sighted, seeing distant things,
Near things but poorly—this is much to hope!
But if we get a freedom that is free
For Elenor Murrays, maidens all forlorn,
And tattered men, and so prevent the wars,
Already budding in this pact of peace,
This war is good, and Elenor Murray's life
Not waste, but gain.

Now for a final mood,
As it were second sight. I open the door,
Walk from the house of Jack, look at the roof,
The chimneys, over them see depths of blue.
Jack's house becomes a little ark that sails,
Tosses and bobbles in an infinite sea.
And all events of evil, war and strife,
The pain and folly, test of this and that,
The groping from one thing to something else,
Old systems turned to new, old eras dead,
New eras rising, these are ripples all
Moving from some place in the eternal sea
Where Jack is throwing stones,—these ripples lap
Against the house of Jack, or toss it so
The occupants go reeling here and there,
Laugh, scowl, grow sick, tread on each other's toes,
While all the time the sea is most concerned
With tides and currents, little with the house,
Ignore this Elenor Murray or Voltaire,

Who living and who dying reproduce
Ripples upon the pools of time and place,
That knew them; and so on where neither eye
Nor mind can trace the ripples vanishing
In ether, realms of spirit, what you choose!

SO WE GREW TOGETHER

Reading over your letters I find you wrote me
"My dear boy," or at times "dear boy," and the envelope
Said "master"—all as I had been your very son,
And not the orphan whom you adopted.
Well, you were father to me! And I can recall
The things you did for me or gave me:
One time we rode in a box car to Springfield
To see the greatest show on earth;
And one time you gave me redtop boots,
And one time a watch, and one time a gun.
Well, I grew to gawkiness with a voice
Like a rooster trying to crow in August
Hatched in April, we'll say.
And you went about wrapped up in silence
With eyes aflame, and I heard little rumors
Of what they were doing to you, and how
They wronged you—and we were poor—so poor!
And I could not understand why you failed,
And why if you did good things for the people
The people did not sustain you.
And why you loved another woman than Aunt Susan,
So it was whispered at school, and what could be baser,
Or so little to be forgiven? . . .

They crowded you hard in those days,
But you fought like a wounded lion
For yourself I know, but for us, for me.
At last you fell ill, and for months you tottered
Around the streets as thin as death,
Trying to earn our bread, your great eyes glowing
And the silence around you like a shawl!

But something in you kept you up.
You grew well again and rosy with cheeks
Like an Indian peach almost, and eyes
Full of moonlight and sunlight, and a voice
That sang, and a humor that warded
The arrows off. But still between us
There was reticence; you kept me away
With a glittering hardness; perhaps you thought
I kept you away—for I was moving
In spheres you knew not, living through
Beliefs you believed in no more, and ideals
That were just mirrors of unrealities.
As a boy can be I was critical of you
And reasons for your failures began to arise
In my mind—I saw specific facts here and there
With no philosophy at hand to weld them,
And synthesize them into one truth.
And a rush of the strength of youth
Deluded me into thinking the world
Was something so easily understood and managed,
While I knew it not at all in truth.
And an adolescent egotism
Made me feel you did not know me,
Or comprehend the all that I was.
All this you divined. . . .

So it went. And when I left you and passed
To the world, the city—still I see you
With eyes averted, and feel your hand
Limp with sorrow—you could not speak.
You thought of what I might be, and where
Life would take me, and how it would end—
There was longer silence. A year or two
Brought me closer to you. I saw the play now,
And the game somewhat and understood your fights
And enmities, and hardnesses and silences,
And wild humor that had kept you whole—
For your soul had made it as an antitoxin
To the world's infections. And you swung to me
Closer than before—and a chumship began
Between us. . . .

What vital power was yours!
You never tired, or needed sleep, or had a pain,
Or refused a delight. I loved the things now
You had always loved, a winning horse,
A roulette wheel, a contest of skill
In games or sports . . . long talks on the corner
With men who have lived and tell you
Things with a rich flavor of old wisdom or humor;
A woman, a glass of whisky at a table
Where the fatigue of life falls, and our reserves
That wait for happiness come up in smiles,
Laughter, gentle confidences. Here you were
A man with youth, and I a youth was a man,
Exulting in your braveries and delight in life.
How you knocked that scamp over at Harry Varnell's
When he tried to take your chips! And how I,
Who had thought the devil in cards as a boy,
Loved to play with you now and watch you play;
And watch the subtle mathematics of your mind
Prophesy, divine the plays. Who was it
In your ancestry that you harked back to
And reproduced with such various gifts
Of flesh and spirit, Anglo-Saxon, Celt?—
You with such rapid wit and powerful skill
For catching illogic and whipping Error's
Fangèd head from the body? . . .

I was really ahead of you
At this stage, with more self-consciousness
Of what man is, and what life is at last,
And how the spirit works, and by what laws,
With what inevitable force. But still I was
Behind you in that strength which in our youth,
If ever we have it, squeezes all the nectar
From the grapes. It seemed you'd never lose
This power and sense of joy, but yet at times
I saw another phase of you. . . .

There was the day
We rode together north of the old town,
Past the old farm houses that I knew—

Past maple groves, and fields of corn in the shock,
And fields of wheat with the fall green.
It was October, but the clouds were summer's,
Lazily floating in a sky of June;
And a few crows flying here and there,
And a quail's call, and around us a great silence
That held at its core old memories
Of pioneers, and dead days, forgotten things!
I'll never forget how you looked that day. Your hair
Was turning silver now, but still your eyes
Burned as of old, and the rich olive glow
In your cheeks shone, with not a line or wrinkle!—
You seemed to me perfection—a youth, a man!
And now you talked of the world with the old wit,
And now of the soul—how such a man went down
Through folly or wrong done by him, and how
Man's death cannot end all,
There must be life hereafter! . . .

As you were that day, as you looked and spoke,
As the earth was, I hear as the soul of it all
Godard's *Dawn,* Dvorák's *Humoresque,*
The Morris Dances, Mendelssohn's *Barcarole,*
And old Scotch songs, *When the Kye Come Hame,*
And *The Moon Had Climbed the Highest Hill,*
The Musetta Waltz and Rudolph's Narrative;
Your great brow seemed Beethoven's
And the lust of life in your face Cellini's,
And your riotous fancy like Dumas.
I was nearer you now than ever before,
And finding each other thus I see to-day
How the human soul seeks the human soul
And finds the one it seeks at last.
For you know you can open a window
That looks upon embowered darkness,
When the flowers sleep and the trees are still
At Midnight, and no light burns in the room;
And you can hide your butterfly
Somewhere in the room, but soon you will see
A host of butterfly mates

Fluttering through the window to join
Your butterfly hid in the room.
It is somehow thus with souls. . . .

This day then I understood it all:
Your vital democracy and love of men
And tolerance of life; and how the excess of these
Had wrought your sorrows in the days
When we were so poor, and the small of mind
Spoke of your sins and your connivance
With sinful men. You had lived it down,
Had triumphed over them, and you had grown
Prosperous in the world and had passed
Into an easy mastery of life and beyond the thought
Of further conquests for things.
As the Brahmins say, no more you worshiped matter,
Or scarcely ghosts, or even the gods
With singleness of heart.
This day you worshiped Eternal Peace,
Or Eternal Flame, with scarce a laugh or jest
To hide your worship; and I understood,
Seeing so many facets of you, why it was
Blind Condon always smiled to hear your voice,
And why it was in a greenroom years ago
Booth turned to you, marking your face
From all the rest, and said, "There is a man
Who might play Hamlet—better still Othello";
And why it was the women loved you; and the priest
Could feed his body and soul together drinking
A glass of beer and visiting with you. . . .

Then something happened:
Your face grew smaller, your brow more narrow,
Dull fires burned in your eyes,
Your body shriveled, you walked with a cynical shuffle,
Your hands mixed the keys of life,
You had become a discord.
A monstrous hatred consumed you—
You had suffered the greatest wrong of all,
I knew and granted the wrong.

You had mounted up to sixty years, now breathing hard,
And just at the time that honor belonged to you
You were dishonored at the hands of a friend.
I wept for you, and still I wondered
If all I had grown to see in you and find in you
And love in you was just a fond illusion—
If after all I had not seen you aright as a boy:
Barbaric, hard, suspicious, cruel, redeemed
Alone by bubbling animal spirits—
Even these gone now, all of you smoke
Laden with stinging gas and lethal vapor. . . .
Then you came forth again like the sun after storm—
The deadly uric acid driven out at last
Which had poisoned you and dwarfed your soul—
So much for soul!

The last time I saw you
Your face was full of golden light,
Something between flame and the richness of flesh.
You were yourself again, wholly yourself.
And oh, to find you again and resume
Our understanding we had worked so long to reach—
You calm and luminant and rich in thought!
This time it seemed we said but "yes" or "no"—
That was enough; we smoked together
And drank a glass of wine and watched
The leaves fall sitting on the porch. . . .
Then life whirled me away like a leaf,
And I went about the crowded ways of New York.

And one night Alberta and I took dinner
At a place near Fourteenth Street where the music
Was like the sun on a breeze-swept lake
When every wave is a patine of fire,
And I thought of you not at all
Looking at Alberta and watching her white teeth
Bite off bits of Italian bread;
And watching her smile and the wide pupils
Of her eyes, electrified by wine
And music and the touch of our hands

DEAR OLD DICK

Now and then across the table.
We went to her house at last.
And through a languorous evening,
Where no light was but a single candle,
We circled about and about a pending theme,
Till at last we solved it suddenly in rapture
Almost by chance; and when I left
She followed me to the hall and leaned above
The railing about the stair for the farewell kiss.
And I went into the open air ecstatically,
With the stars in the spaces of sky between
The towering buildings, and the rush
Of wheels and clang of bells,
Still with the fragrance of her lips and cheeks,
And glinting hair about me, delicate
And keen in spite of the open air.
And just as I entered the brilliant car
Something said to me you were dead—
I had not thought of you, was not thinking of you.
But I knew it was true, as it was,
For the telegram waited me at my room. . . .
I didn't come back.
I could not bear to see the breathless breath
Over your brow—nor look at your face—
However you fared or where,
To what victories soever—
Vanquished or seemingly vanquished!

DEAR OLD DICK

(Dedicated to Vachel Lindsay and in Memory of Richard E. Burke)

Said dear old Dick
To the colored waiter:
"Here, George! be quick
Roast beef and a potato.
I'm due at the courthouse at half-past one,
You black old scoundrel, get a move on you!

I want a pot of coffee and a graham bun.
This vinegar decanter'll make a groove on you,
You black-faced mandril, you grinning baboon—"
"Yas sah! Yas sah," answered the coon.
"Now don't you talk back," said dear old Dick,
"Go and get my dinner or I'll show you a trick
With a plate, a tumbler or a silver castor,
Fuliginous monkey, sired by old Nick."
And the nigger all the time was moving round the table,
Rattling the silver things faster and faster—
"Yas sah? Yas sah, soon as I'se able
I'll bring yo' dinnah as shore as yo's bawn."
"Quit talking about it; hurry and be gone,
You low-down nigger," said dear old Dick.

Then I said to my friend: "Suppose he'd up and stick
A knife in your side for raggin' him so hard;
Or how would you relish some spit in your broth?
Or a little Paris green in your cheese for chard?
Or something in your coffee to make your stomach froth?
Or a bit of asafœtida hidden in your pie?
That's a gentlemanly nigger or he'd black your eye."

Then dear old Dick made this long reply:
"You know, I love a nigger,
And I love this nigger.
I met him first on the train from California
Out of Kansas City; in the morning early
I walked through the diner, feeling upset
For a cup of coffee, looking rather surly.
And there sat this nigger by a table all dressed,
Waiting for the time to serve the omelet,
Buttered toast and coffee to the passengers.
And this is what he said in a fine Southern way:
'Good mawnin', sah, I hopes yo' had yo' rest,
I'm glad to see you on dis sunny day.'
Now think! here's a human who has no other cares
Except to please the white man, serve him when he's starving.
And who has as much fun when he sees you carving
The sirloin as you do, does this black man.

Just think for a minute, how the negroes excel,
Can you beat them with a banjo or a broiling pan?
There's music in their soul as original
As any breed of people in the whole wide earth;
They're elemental hope, heartiness, mirth.
There are only two things real American:
One is Christian Science, the other is the nigger.
Think it over for yourself and see if you can figure
Anything beside that is not imitation
Of something in Europe in this hybrid nation.
Return to this globe five hundred years hence—
You'll see how the fundamental color of the coon
In art, in music, has altered our tune;
We are destined to bow to their influence;
There's a whole cult of music in Dixie alone,
And that is America put into tone."

And dear old Dick gathered speed and said:
"Sometimes through Dvorák a vision arises
To the words of Merneptah whose hands were red:
'I shall live, I shall live, I shall grow, I shall grow,
I shall wake up in peace, I shall thrill with the glow
Of the life of Temu, the god who prizes
Favorite souls and the souls of kings.'
Now these are the words, and here is the dream,
No wonder you think I am seeing things:
The desert of Egypt shimmers in the gleam
Of the noonday sun on my dazzled sight.
And a giant negro as black as night
Is walking by a camel in a caravan.
His great back glistens with the streaming sweat.
The camel is ridden by a light-faced man,
A Greek perhaps, or Arabian.
And this giant negro is rhythmically swaying
With the rhythm of the camel's neck up and down.
He seems to be singing, rollicking, playing;
His ivory teeth are glistening, the Greek is listening
To the negro keeping time like a tabouret.
And what cares he for Memphis town,
Merneptah the bloody, or Books of the Dead,

Pyramids, philosophies of madness or dread?
A tune is in his heart, a reality:
The camel, the desert are things that be,
He's a negro slave, but his heart is free."

Just then the colored waiter brought in the dinner.
"Get a hustle on you, you miserable sinner,"
Said dear old Dick to the colored waiter.
"Heah's a nice piece of beef and a great big potato.
I hopes yo'll enjoy 'em sah, yas I do;
Heah's black mustahd greens, 'specially for yo',
And a fine piece of jowl that I swiped and took
From a dish set by, by the git-away cook.
I hope yo'll enjoy 'em, sah, yas I do."
"Well, George," Dick said, "if Gabriel blew
His horn this minute, you'd up and ascend
To wait on St. Peter world without end."

THE COCKED HAT

Would that some one would knock Mr. Bryan into a cocked hat.—Woodrow Wilson.

It ain't really a hat at all, Ed:
You know that, don't you?
When you bowl over six out of the nine pins,
And the three that are standing
Are the triangular three in front,
You've knocked the nine into a cocked hat.
If it was really a hat, he would be knocked in, too.
Which he hardly is. For a man with money,
And a man who can draw a crowd to listen
To what he says, ain't all-in yet. . . .
Oh yes, defeated
And killed off a dozen times, but still
He's one of the three nine pins that's standing . . .
Eh? Why, the other is Teddy, the other
Wilson, we'll say. We'll see, perhaps.
But six are down to make the cocked hat—

That's me and thousands of others like me,
And the first-rate men who were cuffed about
After the Civil War,
And most of the more than six million men
Who followed this fellow into the ditch,
While he walked down the ditch and stepped to the level
Following an ideal!

Do you remember how slim he was,
And trim he was,
With black hair and pale brow,
And the hawklike nose and flashing eyes,
Not turning slowly like an owl
But with a sudden eagle motion? . . .

One time, in '96, he came here
And we had just a dollar and sixty cents
In the treasury of the organization.
So I stuck his lithograph on a pole
And started out for the station.
By the time we got back here to Clark street
Four thousand men were marching in line,
And a band that was playing for an opening
Of a restaurant on Franklin street
Had left the job and was following his carriage.
Why, it took all the money Mark Hanna could raise
To beat me, with nothing but a pole
And a lithograph.
And it wasn't because he was one of the prophets
Come back to earth again.
It shows how human hearts are hungry,
How wonderfully true they are—
And how they will rise and follow a man
Who seems to see the truth!
Well, these fellows who marched are the cocked hat,
And I am the cocked hat, and the six millions,
And more are the cocked hat,
Who got themselves despised or suspected
Of ignorance or something for being with him.
But still, he's one of the pins that's standing.

He got the money that he went after,
And he has a place in history, perhaps—
Because we took the blow and fell down
When the ripping ball went wild on the alley.

For we were radicals,
And he wasn't a radical.
Eh? Why, a radical stands for freedom,
And for truth—which he never finds
But always looks for.
A radical is not a moralist.
A radical doesn't say:
"This is true and you must believe it;
This is good and you must accept it,
And if you don't believe it and accept it
We'll get a law and make you,
And if you don't obey the law, we'll kill you—"
Oh no! A radical stands for freedom.

Do you remember that banquet at the Tremont
In '97 on Jackson's day?
Bryan and Altgeld walked together
Out to the banquet room.
That's the time he said the bolters must
Bring fruits meet for repentance—ha! ha! Oh, Gawd!—
They never did it and they didn't have to,
For they had made friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,
Even as he did, a little later, in his own way.
Well, a man was there that night.
I thought it was terribly raw in him,
But he said to Bryan, there, in a group:
"You'd better go back to Lincoln and study
Science, history, philosophy,
And read Flaubert's Madam something-or-other,
And quit this village religious stuff.
You're head of the party before you are ready,
And a leader should lead with thought."
And Bryan turned to the others and said:
"This man's the only man in the world
Who looks down on me for believing in God."

"Your kind of a God," this man said.
Honest, Ed, I didn't see this religious business
In Bryan in '96 or 1900.
Oh, well, I knew he went to Church,
And talked as statesmen do of God—
But McKinley did it, and I used to laugh:
"We've got a man to match McKinley,
And it's good for us, in a squeeze like this,
We didn't nominate some fellow
Ethical culture or Unitarian."
You see, the newspapers and preachers then
Were raising such a hullabaloo
About irreligion and dishonesty,
And calling old Altgeld an anarchist,
And comparing us to Robespierre
And the guillotine boys in France.
And a little of this religion came in handy.
The same as if you saw a Mason button on me,
You'd know, you see—but Gee!
He was 24-carat religious,
A cover-to-cover man. . . .
He was a trained collie,
And he looked like a lion,
There in the convention of '96—What do you know about that?

But right here, I tell you he ain't a hypocrite,
This ain't a pose. But I'll tell you:
In '96 when they knocked him out,
I know what he said to himself as well
As if I heard him say it . . .
I'll tell you in a minute.
But suppose you were giving a lecture on the constitution,
And you got mixed on your dates,
And the audience rotten-egged you,
And some one in the confusion
Stole the door receipts,
And there you were, disgraced and broke!
But suppose you could just change your clothes,
And lecture to the same audience
On the religious nature of Washington,

And be applauded and make money—
You'd do it, wouldn't you?
Well, this is what Bill said to himself:
"I'm naturally regular and religious.
I'm a moral man and I can prove it
By any one in Marion County,
Or Jacksonville or Lincoln, Nebraska.
I'm a radical, but a radical
Alone can be religious.
I belong to the church, if not to the bank,
Of the people who defeated me.
And I'll prove to religious people
That I'm a man to be trusted—
And just what a radical is.
And I'll make some money while winning the votes
Of the churches over the country." . . .

That's it—it ain't hypocrisy,
It's using what you are for ends,
When you find yourself in trouble.
And this accounts for "The Prince of Peace"—
Except no one but him could write it—
And "The Value of an Ideal"—
(Which is money in bank and several farms) . . .

His place in history?
One time my grandfather, who was nearly blind,
Went out to sow some grass seed.
They had two sacks in the barn,
One with grass seed, one with fertilizer,
And he got the sack with fertilizer,
And scattered it over the ground,
Thinking he was sowing grass.
And as he was finishing up, a grandchild,
Dorothy, eight years old,
Followed him, dropping flower seeds.
Well, after a time
That was the greatest patch of weeds
You ever saw! And the old man sat,
Half blind, on the porch, and said:

WILLIAM MARION REEDY

"Good land, that grass is growing!"
And there was nothing but weeds except
A few nasturtiums here and there
That Dorothy had sown. . . .
Well, I forgot.
There was a sunflower in one corner
That looked like a man with a golden beard,
And a mass of tangled, curly hair—
And a pumpkin growing near it. . . .

Say, Ed! lend me eighty dollars
To pay my life insurance.

WILLIAM MARION REEDY

He sits before you silent as Buddha,
And then you say
This man is Rabelais.
And while you wonder what his stock is,
English or Irish, you behold his eyes
As big and brown as those desirable crockies
With which as boys we used to play.
And then you see the spherical light that lies
Just under the iris coloring,
Before which everything,
Becomes as plain as day.

If you have noticed the rolling jowls
And the face that speaks its chief
Delight in beer and roast beef
Before you have seen his eyes, you see
A man of fleshly jollity,
Like the friars of old in gowns and cowls
To make a show of scowls.
And when he speaks from an orotund depth that growls
In a humorous way like Fielding or Smollett
That turns in a trice to Robert La Follette
Or retraces to Thales of Crete,

And touches upon Descartes coming back
Through the intellectual Zodiac
That's something of a feat.
And you see that the eyes are really the man.
For the thought of him proliferates
This way over to Hindostan,
And that way descanting on Yeats.
With a word on Plato's symposium,
And a little glimpse of Theocritus,
Or something of Bruno's martyrdom,
Or what St. Thomas Aquinas meant
By a certain line obscure to us.
And then he'll take up Horace's odes
Or the Roman civilization;
Or a few of the Iliad's episodes,
Or the Greek deterioration.
Or skip to a word on the plasmic jelly,
Which Benjamin Moore and others think
Is the origin of life. Then Shelley
Comes in a for a look of understanding.
Or he'll tell you about the orientation
Of the ancient dream of Zion.
Or what's the matter with Bryan.
And while the porter is bringing a drink
Something into his fancy skips
And he talks about the Apocalypse,
Or a painter or writer now unknown
In France or Germany, who will soon
Have fame of him through the whole earth blown.

It's not so hard a thing to be wise
In the lore of books.
It's a different thing to be all eyes,
Like a lighthouse which revolves and looks
Over the land and out to sea:
And a lighthouse is what he seems to me!
Sitting like Buddha spiritually cool,
Young as the light of the sun is young,
And taking the even with the odd
As a matter of course, and the path he's trod

As a path that was good enough.
With a sort of transcendental sense
Whose hatred is less than indifference,
And a gift of wisdom in love.
And who can say as he classifies
Men and ages with his eyes
With cool detachment: this is clay,
And that poor fellow is just a fool.
And say what you will, death is a rod.
But I see a light that shines and shines,
And I rather think it's God.

JOHN COWPER POWYS

Astronomer and biologist
And chemical analyst and microscopist,
Observer of men's involuted shells
Where they conceal their hate and even their love
Under insipid ooze or nacreous stuff.
Tracer of criss-cross steps made when great hells
Kept lime as soft as wax
Which thereupon took the imprint of the air
From gnat-like wings of joy or shadowy care.
He makes hard secrets stand in the cul de sac's
Entrance and face him till he lays all bare
That eyes hold or heart of blood contains,
And curious traits in diverse curious brains,
And starved desires in hearts and hopes forgot
Under the sifting ashes of one's lot.

X-ray photographer who flashes
What's in you out of you with sudden crashes
Of wit or oratory in a flood.
He samples and tests the book's, also your blood.
Shows what you are and whence you came,
And who your kindred are, and what your flame
In heat and color is. Poet and wag,
Prophet, magician taking from a bag

Eggs, rabbits, silver globes; the old engram!
Scoffer with reverence, visioned, quick to damn,
Yet laugh at, looking keenly through the sham;
Confessing his own sins, devoid of shame.
He knows himself and laughs,
Or blames himself as he would others blame.
A naughty boy who kicks away the staffs
Which poor decrepits walk by, nearly blind,
Then hurrying up with varied thought to find
Medicinal clay with which dim eyes to heal.

What is the human secret but Proteus'?
And who can catch the old man but his kind?
He was Poseidon's herdsman, knew the streams
Of early being, sea-filled ponds and sluices,
Where life took birth through elemental dreams.
And Proteus glanced with lightning and divined
The cause of Bacchus' madness. But at noon
He counted his sea-calves and ocean-sheep
On Carpathos where waters made a tune,
Following the Orphic sun out of the deep—
Then in his cave he hid him, turned to sleep. . . .

So runs our life to change! and who can catch
The Protean thought must watch,
And be adept at wrestling, in the chase.
And know the god whatever be his face,
Through roar of water where the porpoises
And extravagant dolphins play, in silences
Of noon or midnight. So, John Cowper Powys,
You stand before us gesturing, shoulder bent
A little like King Richard, frizzed of hair,
Rolling your eye for secrets, for the word.
The thresher of your mind is eloquent
With hulls and flakes of words, until at last
The kernel itself pops out, not long deferred. . . .

Here is our wrestler then,
Hunter of secrets of creative souls.
Eluded he may be, he tries again.
His hand slips, clutching at the irised shoals

ON A BUST

Of rapturous thought. And then at times his eyes
Are blinded by a light, or a disguise.
But finally both eye and hand
Obey the infallible senses' brave command—
He catches Proteus then, and with a shout,
The god shouts too, and we who watch the bout
Join in the panic of their merriment!

ON A BUST

Your speeches seemed to answer for the nonce—
They do not justify your head in bronze!
Your essays! talent's failures were to you
Your philosophic gamut, but things true,
Or beautiful, oh never! What's the pons
For you to cross to fame?—Your head in bronze?

What has the artist caught? The sensual chin
That melts away in weakness from the skin,
Sagging from your indifference of mind;
The sullen mouth that sneers at human kind
For lack of genius to create or rule;
The superficial scorn that says "You fool!"
The deep-set eyes that have the mud-cat look
Which might belong to Tolstoi or a crook.
The nose half-thickly fleshed and half in point,
And lightly turned awry as out of joint;
The eyebrows pointing upward satyr-wise,
Scarce like Mephisto, for you scarcely rise
To cosmic irony in what you dream—
More like a tomcat sniffing yellow cream.
The brow! 'Tis worth the bronze it's molded in
Save for the flat-top head and narrow, thin
Backhead which shows your spirit has not soared.
You are a Packard engine in a Ford,
Which wrecks itself and turtles with its load,
Too light and powerful to keep the road.
The master strength for twisting words is caught
In the swift turning wheels of iron thought.

With butcher knives your hands can vivisect
Our butterflies, but you can not erect
Temples of beauty, wisdom. You can crawl,
Hungry and subtle, over Eden's wall,
And shame half grown up truth, or make a lie
Full grown as good. You cannot glorify
Our dreams, or aspirations, or deep thirst.
To you the world's a fig tree which is curst.
You have preached every faith but to betray;
The artist shows us you have had your day.

A giant as we hoped, in truth a dwarf;
A barrel of slop that shines on Lethe's wharf,
Which seemed at first a vessel with sweet wine
For thirsty lips. So down the swift decline
You went through sloven spirit, craven heart
And cynic indolence. And here the art
Of molding clay has caught you for the nonce
And made your shame our shame—your head in bronze!
Some day this bust will lie amid old metals,
Old copper boilers, wires, faucets, kettles.
Some day it will be melted up and molded
In door knobs, inkwells, paper knives, or folded
In leaves and wreaths around the capitals
Of marble columns, or for arsenals
Fashioned in something, or in course of time
Successively made each of these, from grime
Rescued successively, or made a bell
For fire or worship, who on earth can tell?
One thing is sure, you will not long be dust
When this bronze will be broken as a bust
And given to the junkman to re-sell.
You know this, and the thought of it is hell!

WASHINGTON HOSPITAL

That's right, sponge off his face. My name? Oh, yes,
James Frothingham, a reverend, have the church
At the corner of Ayer and Knox Streets, Methodist.

As I was passing by a vile saloon
Some men were entering the back room, saying
Is he dead or drunk, and such things. I looked in,
Went in at last and saw this fellow there,
Hunched, doubled down into a chair asleep,
Mud on his face as you saw, clothes bespattered,
The smell of drink upon him. Then we took him
And brought him here, I helped, a Christian duty.
But more important, if he wakes I'm here
To bring his soul to Christ before he dies—
And he is dying. Yes, it's plain enough
The snows of death are falling. Sponge his face,
And wash his hands! I never saw such hands,
Slender and beautiful! Now you have sponged
His face, look at that brow—it terrifies—
He looks now like a god—who is this man?
I'll tell you all I know: These men were talking
And this is what they said: This is the fellow
They voted yesterday from booth to booth,
They voted him twenty times, and kept him drunk
To vote him. First they found him at the station,
A little tipsy, talking of his griefs.
The conductor put him off there, being drunk.
And so these fellows for election day
Took him in hand and voted him around,
This was the talk.

Look at the curse of drink
If he had touched no drink, he had not been
Tipsy to fall into these ruffian hands,
Who gave him drink and drink, and used him thus
To violate the suffrage, lose his life
Through drink, as he will lose it. He is dying,
Death comes of Sin—what plainer truth than this?
Sin blinds, too, for that brow could comprehend
All things by using what God gave to it.
I do not know his name, with your permission
I'll search his pockets—yes, here is a letter—
No signature, looks like a draught—I'll read:

"Why have you wounded me with words like these:
'He has great genius but no moral sense,'
And written to another! Oh my love!
By this love which I bear you, by the God
Who reigns in heaven do I swear to you
My soul is like a wandering star, consumed
By its own passion, fire, and the eternal
Longing for the eternal, wandering, erring,
But flaming, loving light, aspiring to
The Light of Lights, some sun, I do not know.
It is incapable of aught but honor.
And save for follies, trifles in excess,
Which I lament, but which in men of wealth,
Or worldly power would never raise a word,
I can recall no act of mine to bring
A blush to your cheek or to mine.

My love,
My erring which has counted, by the test
Of strength or weakness for the game of life,
Has been Quixotic honor, chivalry.
And to indulge this feeling I have paid,
Though it has been my true voluptuousness,
My highest, purest pleasure. Yes, for this
I threw away a fortune, glad to throw it,
Rather than suffer wrong, though trivial,
As worldly men would count it:—for a father's
Laughter at my writing turned away
To follow voices, and defied his will
To harness me to business. So it is
To keep my spirit spotless from the world,
As I have visioned things, I came at last
By this deserted shore, alone, alone,
Now quite alone since you withdrew yourself,
Took back your hand and left me to my way,
Traveled so long that I can see the tomb
At the vista's end, not very far.

Oh, love,
Why is there not a heart that loves but mine?
If you had been a Magdalene, I had pressed

Your head against my breast and kept you there—
But you—my spirit drifts with stricken wings—
But you, because of gossip, crawling words
About my drinking, lies as I shall prove,
Can hold a handkerchief upon your eyes
To hide tumultuous tears, extend your hand
And say farewell forever, cut our lives
Of days or months, fragile and trivial
Asunder—when your hand, your faith, your love
Had cured me of my spirit's desolation,
My terror of this solitude in life—
Or if it cured me not, I had been eased,
And you had gained for giving—what have you
For your decision? Sorrow, if you love me,
Perhaps a conscience whisper that you failed
In justice, sacrifice; perhaps the thought
Life with me drinking, to the excess you thought,
Is better than a life where I am not.
What have you gained? In a few years we two
Will be at one with earth—before it comes
Are not sweet hours together worth the cost
Of a little drink? You who have riches, need not
My labors for your bread, but need my love,
Which you crush out. But as to drink, I swear
I do not drink."

Ahem! the fellow stirs
But will not wake, I fear. You heard that last:
He swears he does not drink. Drink and untruth
Go always hand in hand. This letter's long—
Let's see what he comes up with at the last:
"But as to drink, I swear I do not drink—
How if I drank could I produce the works
I have produced? A giant's task, when drink
Sustains me not, is not my nutriment
As hock and soda water were for Byron,
But sets me flaming wild, a little drink
Will set me flaming, poisons me, I know.
And yet I must partake of drink sometimes
For life is flying, is recession, we
Are shrinking back into ourselves, at last

The arms we shrank from close about us—death's.
And there are souls born lonely; I am one.
And gifted with the glance of looking through
The shams, the opera bouffe, and I am one.
Often after a stretch of toil when I
Come out of the trance of writing spent and wracked,
I used to walk to High Bridge, sit and muse,
(For this brain never stops and that's my curse,)
Upon this monstrous world and why it is;
And why the souls who love the beautiful,
And love it only and are doomed to speak
Its wonder and its terror are alone,
Misunderstood and hunted, fouled by falsehood,
Have crumbs upon the steps, are licked by dogs,
Or else are starved. And why it is that I
Must go about, a beggar, with my songs,
Exchanging them for bread. And then it is
When this poor brain like the creative stuff,
The central purpose, whirls, as I have written,
And will not stop—drink! for oblivion,
For rest, to get away from self, back faster
From the pursuing Nothing.

Yet, my love,
Think out what causes judgments, standards, tastes;
And why it was that Southey, Wordsworth won
The organic national praise and Shelley lost,
And Byron lost it—Southey the sycophant,
Wordsworth the dull adherent, renegade—
These two against these spirits who came here
To sing of Liberty—and look at me,
A wanderer and a poor, rejected man,
While usurers, slave owners rule the land,
And the cities reek with hypocrites, who step
On Freedom and on Beauty, are rewarded,
Praised, fed and honored for it. Then behold
Your friend who loves you, hunted, buffeted,
For a little drink, when in spite of drink and even
Because of drink, who knows? I have achieved,
Written these books. And what is life beside,

Whether with drink or whether with abstinence,
Except to sing your song and die, what course
Can stave the event, the wage of life, not sin?
Oh if you knew what love I have for you!
All of my powers are not enough to tell
How all my heart is yours, how I have found
Eternal things through you, cannot surrender
Your love, your heart, without I lose some life,
Some vital part of me—and yet farewell,
For you have willed it so, and I submit.
I rise up in my loneliness, seek the sun
To shine about me in my loneliness,
Submit and say farewell."

He spoke some words!
What was it that he said? His head rolls over.
The man is dead! What was it that he said?
Something about "no more" it seemed to me.
Whom shall we notify? Go tell the police!
Here! wait, I overlooked some writing—yes,
A name is on this letter—why, look here,
It's Edgar Allan Poe!—I know that name—
He wrote a poem once about sleigh bells—
His brow looks whiter, bigger than it did.
Cover him with a sheet—I'll tell the police!

THE GREAT VALLEY AND THE CITY

STARVED ROCK

As a soul from whom companionships subside
The meaningless and onsweeping tide
Of the river hastening, as it would disown
Old ways and places, left this stone
Of sand above the valley, to look down
Miles of the valley, hamlet, village, town.

It is a head-gear of a chief whose head,
Down from the implacable brow,
Waiting is held below
The waters, feather decked
With blossoms blue and red,
With ferns and vines;
Hiding beneath the waters, head erect,
His savage eyes and treacherous designs.

It is a musing memory and memorial
Of geologic ages
Before the floods began to fall;
The cenotaph of sorrows, pilgrimages
Of Marquette and LaSalle.
The eagles and the Indians left it here
In solitude, blown clean
Of kindred things: as an oak whose leaves are sere
Fly over the valley when the winds are keen,
And nestle where the earth receives
Another generation of exhausted leaves.

Fatigued with age its sleepless eyes look over
Fenced fields of corn and wheat,
Barley and clover.
The lowered pulses of the river beat
Invisibly by shores that stray
In progress and retreat

Past Utica and Ottawa,
And past the meadow where the Illini
Shouted and danced under the autumn moon,
When toddlers and papooses gave a cry,
And dogs were barking for the boon
Of the hunter home again to clamorous tents,
Smoking beneath the evening's copper sky.
Later the remnant of the Illini
Climbed up this Rock, to die
Of hunger, thirst, or down its sheer ascents
Rushed on the spears of Pottawatomies,
And found the peace
Where thirst and hunger are unknown.

This is the tragic and the fateful stone
Le Rocher or Starved Rock,
A symbol and a paradigm,
A sphinx of elegy and battle hymn,
Whose lips unlock
Life's secret, which is vanishment, defeat,
In epic dirges for the races
That pass and leave no traces
Before new generations driven in the blast
Of Time and Nature, blowing round its head.
Renewing in the Present what the Past
Knew wholly, or in part, so to repeat
Warfare, extermination, old things dead,
But brought to life again
In Life's immortal pain.

What Destinies confer,
And laughing mock
LaSalle, his dreamings stir
To wander here, depart
The fortress of Creve Cœur,
Of broken heart,
For this fort of Starved Rock?
After the heart is broken then the cliff
Where vultures flock;
And where below its steeps the savage skiff

Cuts with a pitiless knife the rope let down
For water. From the earth this Indian town
Vanished, and on this Rock the Illini
Thirsting, their buckets taken with the knife,
Lay down to die.

This is the land where every generation
Lets down its buckets for the water of Life.
We are the children and the epigone
Of the Illini, the vanished nation.
And this starved scarp of stone
Is now the emblem of our tribulation,
The inverted cup of our insatiable thirst.
The Illini by fate accursed,
This land lost to the Pottawatomies,
They lost the land to us,
Who baffled and idolatrous,
And thirsting, spurred by hope
Kneel upon aching knees,
And with our eager hands draw up the bucketless rope.

This is the tragic, the symbolic face,
Le Rocher or Starved Rock,
Round which the eternal turtles drink and swim,
And serpents green and strange,
As race comes after race,
War after war.
This is the sphinx whose Memnon lips breathe dirges
To empire's wayward star,
And over the race's restless urges,
Whose lips unlock
Life's secret which is vanishment and change.

FORT DEARBORN

Here the old Fort stood
When the river bent southward.
Now because the world pours itself into Chicago
The Lake runs into the river

Past docks and switch-yards,
And under bridges of iron.

Sand dunes stretched along the lake for miles.
There was a great forest in the Loop.
Now Michigan Avenue lies
Between miles of lights,
And the Rialto blazes
Where the wolf howled.

In the loneliness of the log-cabin,
Across the river,
The fur-trader played his fiddle
When the snow lay
About the camp of the Pottawatomies
In the great forest.
Now to the music of the Kangaroo Hop,
And Ragging the Scale,
And La Seduccion,
The boys and girls are dancing
In a café near Lake Street.

The world is theirs now.
There is neither a past nor a to-morrow,
Save of dancing.
Nor do they know that behind them
In the seed not yet sown
There are eyes which will open upon Chicago,
And feet which will blossom for the dance,
And hands which will reach up,
And push them into the silence
Of the old fiddler.

They threw a flag
Over the coffin of Lieutenant Farnum,
And buried him back of the Fort
In ground where now
The spice mills stand.
And his little squaw with a baby
Sat on the porch grieving,

While the band played.
Then hands pushing the world
Buried a million soldiers, and afterward
Pale multitudes swept through the court house
To gaze for the last time
Upon the shrunken face of Lincoln.
And the fort at thirty-fifth street vanished.
And where the Little Giant lived
They made a park
And put his statue
Upon a column of marble.
Now the glare of the steel mills at South Chicago
Lights the bronze brow of Douglas.
It is his great sorrow
Haunting the Lake at mid-night.

When the South was beaten
They were playing
John Brown's Body Lies Mouldering in the Grave,
And Babyon is Fallen and Wake Nicodemus.
Now the boys and girls are dancing
To the Merry Whirl and Hello Frisco
Where they waltzed in crinoline
When the Union was saved.

There was the Marble Terrace
Glory of the seventies!
They wrecked it,
And brought colors and figures
From later Athens and Pompeii,
And put them on walls.
And beneath panels of red and gold,
And shimmering tesseræ,
And tragic masks and comic masks,
And wreaths and bucrania,
Upon mosaic floors
Red-lipped women are dancing
With dark men.
Some sit at tables drinking and watching,
Amorous in an air of French perfumes.

Like ships at mid-night
The kingdoms of the world
Know not whither they go nor to what port.
Nor do you, embryo hands,
In the seed not yet sown
Know of the wars to come.

They may fill the sky with armored dragons,
And the waters with iron monsters;
They may build arsenals
Where now upon marble floors
The boys and girls
Are dancing the Alabama Jubilee,
The processional of time is a falling stream,
Through which you thrust your hand.
And between the dancers and the silence forever
There shall be the livers,
Gazing upon the torches they have lighted,
And watching their own which are failing,
And crying for oil,
And finding it not!

CHICAGO

I

On the gray paper of this mist and fog
With dust for the erasure and with smoke
For drawing crayons, be this charcoal scrawl:
The breed of Gog in the kingdom of Magog,
Skyscrapers, helmeted, stand sentinel
Amid the obscuring fumes of coal and coke,
Raised by enchantment out of the sand and bog.
This sky-line, the Sierras of the lake,
Cuts with dulled teeth,
Which twist and break,
The imponderable and drifting steam.
And restlessly beneath
This man-created mountain chain,
Like the flow of a prairie river

Endlessly by day and night, forever
Along the boulevards pedestrians stream
In a shuffle like dancers to a low refrain:
Forever by day and night,
Pursuing as of old the lure of delight,
And the ghosts of pleasure or pain.
Their rhythmic feet sound like the falling of rain,
Or the hush of the waves, when the roar
Is blown by a wind off shore.

II

From a tower like a mountain promontory
The cesspool of a railroad lies to view,
Fouling the marble of the city's glory:
A crapulous sluice of garbage and of cars,
Where engines rush and whistle, smudge the blue
With filth like the trail of slugs.
It is a trench of steel which bars
Free access to the common shore, and hugs
In a coil of lazar arms the boulevard.
Cattle and hogs delivered here for slaughter
Corrupt the loveliness of the water front.
They low and grunt,
Switched back and forth within the tangled yard.
But from this tower the amethystine water,
The water of jade or slate,
Is visible with its importunate
Gestures against the sky to still retreats
In Michigan, of quiet woods and hills
Beyond the simmering passion of these streets,
And all their endless ills. . . .

III

But over the switch yard stands the Institute
Guarded by lions on the avenue,
Colossal lions standing for attack;
Between whose feet luminous and resolute
Children of the city passing through
To palettes, compasses, the demoniac
Spirit of the city shall subdue.

Lions are in the loop and jackals too.
They have no trainers but the alderman,
Who uses them to hunt with. But in time
The city shall behold its nobler plan
Achieved by hands that rhyme,
Workers who architect and build,
And out of thought its substance re-arrange,
Till all its prophecies shall be fulfilled.
Through numbers, science and art
The city shall know change,
And win dominion over water and light,
The cyclop's mastery of the mart;
The devils overcome,
Which stalk the squalid ways by night
Of poverty and the slum,
Where the crook is spawned, the burglar and the bum.
These youths who pass the lions shall assuage
The city's thirst and hunger,
And save it from the wastage and the wage
Of the demagogue, the precinct monger.

IV

This is the city of great doges hidden
In guarded offices and country places.
The city strives against the things forbidden
By the doges, on whose faces
The city at large never looks;
Doges who could accomplish if they would
In a month the city's beauty and good.
Yet this city in a hundred years has risen
Out of a haunt of foxes, wolves and rooks,
And breaks asunder now the bars of the prison
Of dead days and dying. It has spread
For many a rood its boundaries, like the sprawled
And fallen Hephæstos, and has tenanted
Its neighborhoods increasing and unwalled
With peoples from all lands.
From Milwaukee Avenue to the populous mills
Of South Chicago, from the Sheridan Drive
Through forests where the water smiles

ST. MARY'S COLL
LIBRARY

To Harlem for miles and miles.
It reaches out its hands,
Powerful and alive
With dreams to touch to-morrow, which it wills
To dawn and which shall dawn. . . .
And like lights that twinkle through the stench
And putrid mist of abattoirs,
Great souls are here, separate and withdrawn,
Companionless, whom darkness cannot quench.
Seeing they are the chrysalis which must feed
Upon its own thoughts and the life to be,
Its flight among the stars.
Beauty is here, like half protected flowers,
Blooms and will cast its multiplying seed,
Until one mass of color shall succeed
The shaley places of these arid hours.

Chicago! by this inland sea
In the land of Lincoln, in the State
Of souls who held the nation's fate,
City both old and young, I consecrate
Your future years to truth and liberty.
Be this the record frail and incomplete
Of one who saw you, mingled with the masses
Along these magical mountain passes
With restless yet with hopeful feet.
Could they return to see you who have slept
These fifty years, who laid your first foundations!
And oh! could we behold you who have kept
Their promise for you, when new generations
Shall walk this boulevard made fair
In chiseled marble, looking at the lake
Of clearer water under a bluer air.
We who shall sleep then nor awake,
Have left the labor to you and the care
Ask great fulfillment, for ourselves a prayer!

THE LOOP

From State street bridge a snow-white glimpse of sea
Beyond the river walled in by red buildings,
O'ertopped by masts that take the sunset's gildings,
Roped to the wharf till spring shall set them free.
Great floes make known how swift the river's current.
Out of the north sky blows a cutting wind.
Smoke from the stacks and engines in a torrent
Whirls downward, by the eddying breezes thinned.
Enskyed are sign boards advertising soap,
Tobacco, coal, transcontinental trains.
A tug is whistling, straining at a rope,
Fixed to a dredge with derricks, scoops and cranes.
Down in the loop the blue-gray air enshrouds,
As with a cyclop's cape, the man-made hills,
And towers of granite where the city crowds.
Above the din a copper's whistle shrills.

There is a smell of coffee and of spices.
We near the market place of trade's devices.
Blue smoke from out a roasting room is pouring.
A rooster crows, geese cackle, men are bawling.
Whips crack, trucks creak, it is the place of storing,
And drawing out and loading up and hauling
Fruit, vegetables and fowls and steaks and hams,
Oysters and lobsters, fish and crabs and clams.
And near at hand are restaurants and bars,
Hotels with rooms at fifty cents a day;
Beer tunnels, pool rooms, places where cigars
And cigarettes their window signs display;
Mixed in with letterings of printed tags,
Twine, boxes, cartels, sacks and leather bags,
Wigs, telescopes, eyeglasses, ladies' tresses,
Or those who manicure or fashion dresses,
Or sell us putters, tennis balls or brassies,
Make shoes, pull teeth, or fit the eye with glasses.

And now the rows of windows showing laces,
Silks, draperies and furs and costly vases,

Watches and mirrors, silver cups and mugs,
Emeralds, diamonds, Indian, Persian rugs,
Hats, velvets, silver buckles, ostrich-plumes,
Drugs, violet water, powder and perfumes.
Here is a monstrous winking eye—beneath
A showcase by an entrance full of teeth.
Here rubber coats, umbrellas, mackintoshes,
Hoods, rubber boots and arctics and galoshes.
Here is half a block of overcoats,
In this bleak time of snow and slender throats.
Then windows of fine linen, snakewood canes,
Scarfs, opera hats, in use where fashion reigns.
As when the hive swarms, so the crowded street
Roars to the shuffling of innumerable feet.
Skyscrapers soar above them; they go by
As bees crawl, little scales upon the skin
Of a great dragon winding out and in.
Above them hangs a tangled tree of signs,
Suspended or uplifted like dædalian
Hieroglyphics when the saturnalian
Night commences, and their racing lines
Run fire of blue and yellow in a puzzle,
Bewildering to the eyes of those who guzzle,
And gourmandize and stroll and seek the bubble
Of happiness to put away their trouble.

Around the Loop the elevated crawls,
And giant shadows sink against the walls
Where ten to twenty stories strive to hold
The pale refraction of the sunset's gold.
Slop underfoot, we pass beneath the Loop.
The crowd is uglier, poorer; there are smells
As from the depths of unsuspected hells,
And from a groggery where beer and soup
Are sold for five cents to the thieves and bums.
Here now are huge cartoons in red and blue
Of obese women and of skeleton men,
Egyptian dancers, twined with monstrous snakes,
Before the door a turbaned lithe Hindoo,
A bagpipe shrilling, underneath a den

Of opium, whence a man with hand that shakes,
Rolling a cigarette, so palely comes.

The clang of car bells and the beat of drums.
Draft horses clamping with their steel-shod hoofs.
The buildings have grown small and black and worn;
The sky is more beholden; o'er the roofs
A flock of pigeons soars; with dresses torn
And yellow faces, labor women pass
Some Chinese gabbling; and there, buying fruit,
Stands a fair girl who is a late recruit
To those poor women slain each year by lust.
'Tis evening now and trade will soon begin.
The family entrance beckons for a glass
Of hopeful mockery, the piano's din
Into the street with sounds of rasping wires
Filters, and near a pawner's window shows
Pistols, accordions; and, luring buyers,
A Jew stands mumbling to the passer-by
Of jewelry and watches and old clothes.
A limousine gleams quickly—with a cry
A legless man fastened upon a board
With casters 'neath it by a sudden shove
Darts out of danger. And upon the corner
A lassie tells a man that God is love,
Holding a tambourine with its copper hoard
To be augmented by the drunken scorner.
A woman with no eyeballs in her sockets
Plays "Rock of Ages" on a wheezy organ.
A newsboy with cold hands thrust in his pockets
Cries, "All about the will of Pierpont Morgan!"
The roof-line of the street now sinks and dwindles.
The windows are begrimed with dust and beer.
A child half clothed, with legs as thin as spindles,
Carries a basket with some bits of coal.
Between lace curtains eyes of yellow leer,
The cheeks splotched with white places like the skin
Inside an eggshell—destitute of soul.
One sees a brass lamp oozing kerosene
Upon a stand whereon her elbows lean;
Lighted, it soon will welcome negroes in.

The railroad tracks are near. We almost choke
From filth whirled from the street and stinging vapors.
Great engines vomit gas and heavy smoke
Upon a north wind driving tattered papers,
Dry dung and dust and refuse down the street.
A circumambient roar as of a wheel
Whirring far off—a monster's heart whose beat
Is full of murmurs, comes as we retreat
Towards Twenty-second. And a man with jaw
Set like a tiger's, with a dirty beard,
Skulks toward the Loop, with heavy wrists red-raw
Glowing above his pockets where his hands
Pushed tensely round his hips the coat tails draw,
And show what seems a slender piece of metal
In his hip pocket. On these barren strands
He waits for midnight for old scores to settle
Against his ancient foe society,
Who keeps the soup house and who builds the jails.
Switchmen and firemen with their dinner pails
Go by him homeward, and he wonders if
These fellows know a hundred thousand workers
Walk up and down the city's highways, stiff
From cold and hunger, doomed to poverty,
As wretched as the thieves and crooks and shirkers,
He scurries to the lake front, loiters past
The windows of wax lights with scarlet shades,
Where smiling diners back of ambuscades
Of silk and velvet hear not winter's blast
Blowing across the lake. He has a thought
Of Michigan, where once at picking berries
He spent a summer—then his eye is caught
At Randolph street by written light which tarries,
Then like a film runs into sentences.
He sees it all as from a black abyss.
Taxis with skid chains rattle, limousines
Draw up to awnings; for a space he catches
A scent of musk or violets, sees the patches
On powdered cheeks of furred and jeweled queens.
The color round his cruel mouth grows whiter,
He thrusts his coarse hands in his pockets tighter:
He is a thief, he knows he is a thief,

He is a thief found out, and, as he knows,
The whole Loop is a kingdom held in fief
By men who work with laws instead of blows
From sling shots, so he curses under breath
The money and the invisible hand that owns
From year to year, in spite of change and death,
The wires for the lights and telephones,
The railways on the streets, and overhead
The railways, and beneath the winding tunnel,
Which crooks stole from the city for a runnel
To drain her nickels; and the pipes of lead
Which carry gas, wrapped round us like a snake,
And round the courts, whose grip no court can break.
He curses bitterly all those who rise,
And rule by just the spirit which he plies
Coarsely against the world's great store of wealth;
Bankers and usurers and cliques whose stealth
Works witchcraft through the market and the press,
And hires editors, or owns the stock
Controlling papers, playing with finesse
The city's thinking, that they may unlock
Treasures and powers like burglars in the dark.
And thinking thus and cursing, through a flurry
Of sudden snow he hastens on to Clark.
In a cheap room there is an eye to mark
His coming and be glad. His footsteps hurry.
She will have money, earned this afternoon
Through men who took her from a near saloon,
Wherein she sits at table to dragoon
Roughnecks or simpletons upon a lark.
Within a little hall a fierce-eyed youth
Rants of the burdens on the people's backs—
He would cure all things with the single tax.
A clergyman demands more gospel truth,
Speaking to Christians at a weekly dinner.
A parlor Marxian, for a beginner
Would take the railways. And amid applause
Where lawyers dine, a judge says all will be
Well if we hand down to posterity
Respect for courts and judges and the laws.

An anarchist would fight. Upon the whole,
Another thinks, to cultivate one's soul
Is most important—let the passing show
Go where it wills, and where it wills to go.

Outside the stars look down. Stars are content
To be so quiet and indifferent.

THE MUNICIPAL PIER

Great snail whose lofty horns are knobbed with gold;
Long javelin of red-wood lying straight
Upon the changing indigos which unfold
In blues and chrysophrases from the gate
Of this our city sea-ward, till the gull
Becomes a gnat where lights annihilate
The wings' last beat! Or are you like a hull
Pompeiian red upon the Nile's slate green?
Or are you like those clouds which fanciful
Half open eyes make giant fish serene,
And motionless as rifts of carbuncles
Sunk in a waste of faience sky, between
Such terrifying turquoise? Darkness dulls
The torches of your towers struck to flame
By sunset, and you mass amid the hulls
Of shadows on the water, then reclaim
This blackness with a thousand eyes of light!
Peiræus made with hands, which overcame
The waters, where no point of land gave night
To walls and slips, no Peiraic promontory
Inspired our Hippodamus in his flight
Sea-ward with docks, parades, an auditory
For music and a dancing floor for youths,
But only the sea tempted. Telling the story
That grows within the Loop, its dens and booths,
And palaces of trade, is to omit
The city's lofty genius and the truths
Through which she works at best, against the wit
Of creatures who would sell her body, take

The money of the sale as perquisite
For grossness in luxurious life. Awake
Themistocles of us and carve the dream
Of Burnham into stone! Along this lake
Such as no city looks on, to redeem
Its shores from shrieks and crashes, refuse, smoke.
His architectural vision sketched the scheme
Of harbors, islands, boulevards—he spoke
For these, the concourse, stadium and a tomb
For that dull infamy of filth whose cloak
Is law, hiding the greedy hands that doom
To long delay with bribery. He is gone
These several years into the narrow room
Where beauty is no more of walk or lawn,
Or arch or peristyle, but still he says:
"Work quickly into form what I have drawn,
And give Chicago of these middle days
The glory which it merits: To this Pier
Make wide the marble way, build new the quays
Give to the swimmers depths made fresh and clear,
Lay out the flowering gardens, founts and pools
Such as Versailles knows. The river steer
Under the arches of two decked bascules."
Look at the photographs of seventy-six,
Whoever you are who mocks or ridicules
This city, then imagine stones and bricks
Which from such lowness rose, in fifty years
By so much grown miraculous to transfix
The future's wonder as ours is for piers
Like this, Chicago! O ye men who wield
Small strength or great or none, too apt at sneers
For men who did too little, you must yield
Your names for judgment soon, have you done more
To make this city great than Marshall Field?
While you were railing, idling, on this shore
Hands silent, out of sight were plunged in toil.
You woke one morning to the waters' roar
And saw these gilded turrets flash and spoil
The sunlight of the spring. What have you sown
Of truth or beauty in this eager soil
To make your living felt, your labor known?

THE CITY

Sometimes I see silk banners in the sky,
And hear the sound of silver trumpets blown,
And bells high turreted. And passing by
This firmament of rolling blue great throngs
Stream in an air of brilliant sun where I
A century gone am of it, when my songs
Are but a record of a day that died,
And saw the end of desecrating wrongs.
How sweet bells are borne on the evening tide
High up where heaven is flushed and the moon's sphere
Looks down on temples, arches, where the wide
Eternal waters thunder round the Pier!

THE CITY

The Sun hung like a red balloon
As if he would not rise;
For listless Helios drowsed and yawned.
He cared not whether the morning dawned,
The brother of Eos and the Moon
Stretched him and rubbed his eyes.

He would have dreamed the dream again
That found him under sea;
He saw Zeus sit by Hera's side,
He saw Hephæstos with his bride;
He traced from Enna's flowery plain
The child Persephone.

There was a time when heaven's vault
Cracked like a temple's roof.
A new hierarchy burst its shell,
And as the sapphire ceiling fell,
From stern Jehovah's mad assault,
Vast spaces stretched aloof:

Great blue black depths of frozen air
Engulfed the soul of Zeus.
And then Jehovah reigned instead.
For Judah was living and Greece was dead.

And Hope was born to nurse Despair,
And the Devil was let loose.

Far off in the waste empyrean
The world was a golden mote.
And the Sun hung like a red balloon,
Or a bomb afire o'er a barracoon.
And the sea was drab, and the sea was green
Like a many colored coat.

The sea was pink like cyclamen,
And red as a blushing rose.
It shook anon like the sensitive plant,
Under the golden light aslant.
The little waves patted the shore again
Where the restless river flows.

And thus it has been for ages gone—
For a hundred thousand years;
Ere Buddha lived or Jesus came,
Or ever the city had place or name,
The sea thrilled through at the kiss of dawn
Like a soul of smiles and tears.

When the city's seat was a waste of sand,
And the hydra lived alone,
The sound of the sea was here to be heard,
And the moon rose up like a great white bird,
Sailing aloft from the yellow strand
To her silent midnight throne.

Now Helios eyes the universe,
And he knows the world is small.
Of old he walked through pagan Tyre,
Babylon, Sodom destroyed by fire,
And sought to unriddle the primal curse
That holds the race in thrall.

So he stepped from the Sun in robes of flame
As the city woke from sleep.

He walked the markets, walked the squares,
He walked the places of sweets and snares,
Where men buy honor and barter shame,
And the weak are killed as sheep.

He saw the city is one great mart
Where life is bought and sold.
Men rise to get them meat and bread,
To barter for drugs or coffin the dead.
And dawn is but a plucked-up heart
For the dreary game of gold.

"Ho! ho!" said Helios, "father Zeus
Would never botch it so.
If he had stolen Joseph's bride,
And let his son be crucified
The son's blood had been put to use
To ease the people's woe."

"He of the pest and the burning bush,
Of locusts, lice and frogs,
Who made me stand, veiling my light,
While Joshua slaughtered the Amorite,
Who blacked the skin of the sons of Cush,
And builded the synagogues."

"And Jehovah the Jew is omnipotent,
While Zeus was bound by Fate.
But Athens fell when Peter took Rome,
And Chicago is made His hecatomb.
And since from the hour His son was sent
The hypocrite holds the state."

Helios traversed the city streets
And this is what he saw:
Some sold their honor, some their skill,
The soldier hired himself to kill,
The judges bartered the judgment seats,
And trafficked in the law.

The starving artist sold his youth,
The writer sold his pen;
The lawyer sharpened up his wits
Like a burglar filing auger bits.
And Jesus' vicar sold the truth
To the famished sons of men.

In every heart flamed cruelty
Like a little emerald snake.
And each one knew if he should stand
In another's way the dagger-hand
Would make the stronger the feofee
Of the coveted wapentake.

There's not a thing men will not do
For honor, gold, or power.
We smile and call the city fair,
We call life lovely and debonair,
But Proserpina never grew
So deadly a passion flower.

Go live for an hour in a tropic land
Hid near a sinking pool:
The lion and tiger come to drink,
The boa crawls to the water's brink,
The elephant bull kneels down in the sand,
And drinks till his throat is cool.

Jehovah will keep you awhile unseen
As you lie behind the rocks.
But go, if you dare, to slake your thirst,
Though Jesus died for our life accursed
Your bones by the tiger will be licked clean,
As he licks the bones of an ox.

And the sky may be blue as fleur de lis,
And the earth be tulip red;
And God in heaven, and life all good
While you lie hid in the underwood:
And the city may leave you sorrow free
If you ask it not for bread.

One day Achilles lost a horse
While the pest at Troy was rife,
And a million maggots fought and ate
Like soldiers storming a city's gate,
And Thersites said, as he looked at the corse,
"Achilles, that is life."

Day fades and from a million cells
The office people pour.
Like bees that crawl on the honeycomb
The workers scurry to what is home,
And trains and traffic and clanging bells
Make the cañon highways roar.

Helios walked the city's ways
Till the lights began to shine.
Then the janitor women start to scrub,
And the Pharisees up and enter the club,
And the harlot wakes, and the music plays
And the glasses glow with wine.

Now we're good fellows one and all,
And the buffet storms with talk.
"The market's closed and trade's at end;
We had our battle, now I'm your friend."
And thanks to the spirit of alcohol
Men go for a ride or walk.

Oh, but traffic is not all done,
Nor everything yet sold.
There's woman to win, and plots to weave.
There's a heart to hurt, or one to deceive,
And bargains to bind ere rise of Sun
To garner the morrow's gold.

The market at night is as full of fraud
As the market kept by day.
The courtesan buys a soul with a look,
A dinner tempers the truth in a book,
And love is sold till love is a bawd,
And falsehood froths in the play.

And men and women sell their smiles
For friendship's lifeless dregs.
For fear of the morrow we bend and bow
To moneybags with the slanting brow.
For the heart that knows life's little wiles
Seldom or never begs.

"Poor men," sighed Helios, "how they long
For the ultimate fire of love.
They yearn, through life, like the peacock moth,
And die worn out in search of the troth.
For love in the soul is the siren song
That wrecks the peace thereof."

Helios turned from the world and fled
As the convent bell tolled six.
For he caught a glimpse of an agèd crone
Who knelt beside a coffin alone;
She had sold her cloak to shrive the dead
And buy a crucifix!

CITIES OF THE PLAIN

Where are the cabalists, the insidious committees,
The panders who betray the idiot cities
For miles and miles toward the prairie sprawled,
Ignorant, soulless, rich,
Smothered in fumes of pitch?

Rooms of mahogany in tall skyscrapers
See the unfolding and the folding up
Of ring-clipped papers,
And letters which keep drugged the public cup.
The walls hear whispers and the semi-tones
Of voices in the corner, over telephones
Muffled by Persian padding, gemmed with brass spittoons.
Butts of cigars are on the glass-topped table,
And through the smoke, gracing the furtive Babel,
The bishop's picture blesses the picaroons,
Who start or stop the life of millions moving

Unconscious of obedience, the plastic
Yielders to satanic and dynastic
Hands of reproaching and approving.

Here come knights armed,
But with their arms concealed,
And rubber heeled.
Here priests and wavering want are charmed.
And shadows fall here like the shark's
In messages received or sent.
Signals are flying from the battlement.
And every president
Of rail, gas, coal and oil, the parks,
The receipt of custom knows, without a look,
Their meaning as the code is in no book.
The treasonous cracksmen of the city's wealth
Watch for the flags of stealth!

Acres of coal lie fenced along the tracks.
Tracks ribbon the streets, and beneath the streets
Wires for voices, fire, thwart the plebiscites,
And choke the counsel and symposiacs
Of dreamers who have pity for the backs
That bear and bleed.
All things are theirs: tracks, wires, streets and coal,
The church's creed,
The city's soul,
The city's sea-girt loveliness,
The merciless and meretricious press.
Far up in a watch-tower, where the news is printed,
Gray faces and bright eyes, weary and cynical
Discuss fresh wonders of the old cabal.
But nothing of its work in type is hinted:
Taxes are high! The mentors of the town
Must keep their taxes down
On buildings, presses, stocks
In gas, oil, coal and docks.
The mahogany rooms conceal a spider man
Who holds the taxing bodies through the church,
And knights with arms concealed. The mentors search
The spider man, the master publican,

And for his friendship silence keep,
Letting him herd the populace like sheep
For self and for the insatiable desires
Of coal and tracks and wires;
Pick judges, legislators,
And tax-gatherers.
Or name his favorites, whom they name,
The slick and sinistral,
Servitors of the cabal,
For praise, which seems the equivalent of fame:
Giving to the delicate-handed crackers
Of priceless safes, the spiritual slackers,
The flash and thunder of front pages!
And the gulled millions stare and fling their wages
Where they are bidden, helpless and emasculate.
And the unilluminate,
Whose brows are brass,
Who weep on every Sabbath day
For Jesus riding on an ass,
Scarce know the ass is they,
Now ridden by his effigy,
The publican with Jesus' painted mask,
Along a way where fumes of odorless gas
First spur, then fell them from the task.

Through the parade runs swift the psychic cackle
Like thorns beneath a boiling pot that crackle.
And the angels say to Yahveh looking down
From the alabaster railing, on the town,
O, cackle, cackle, cackle, crack and crack
We wish we had our little Sodom back!

THE CHURCH AND THE HOTEL

Over the dead lake,
And in a dusty sky
The full moon is speared by the spire of the Baptist church;
Or now it hangs over the Groveland Hotel:
I do not know whether it is over the spire,
Or over the hotel.

THE CHURCH AND THE HOTEL

In a dusty sky the moon
Is the bottom of a copper kettle
Which cannot be scoured into brightness.
The sky is a faded mosquito net
Over a brass cylinder cap,
Dulled with verdigris.

Some years ago,
Not many years ago,
The Rev. Albert McDugall, D.D.
At the pulpit under this spire
With habitual regularity
Used to say:
Let us pray.
And the Rev. Albert McDugall, D.D.
With habitual regularity
Used to preach on the wages of sin.
And on Sunday evenings
As he was saying "let us pray,"
Ed Breen in Henry Hughes' buffet,
There in the Groveland Hotel
Sitting with cronies at a table would say:
"Another round, Henry,
Bourbon for me."

And at 7:30,
At the very moment
When the Rev. Albert McDugall, D.D.
Was saying "let us pray,"
Ed Breen would be beginning the night,
And would be saying to Henry Hughes:
"Another round, Henry,
Bourbon for me."

You, Rev. Albert McDugall, D.D.
Lived to a ripe age.
You lived to marry a second wife.
And you, Ed Breen, died in the thirties.
But whether it be better to have ptomaine poisoning
From eating cold chicken,
Or to drug yourself to death with bourbon

I will ask the moon.
For there is the moon
Like a German silver watch
Under a grimy show case.
I think it hangs as much over the hotel
As over the church.

MALACHY DEGAN

Malachy, you stand a referee to judge
Under a torrent of blue light
The naked pugilists who fight,
Grim faces with a smudge

Of blood, or on the sliding arms or backs,
There on a platform roped, in palls
Of smoke to the roof of Tattersall's,
And where the iterant cracks

Of matches struck for lights prick through the hum
Of voices over-toned by cries
Of "Finish him," "Look at his glassy eyes,"
"That sounded like a drum."

When the timekeeper's gong went clang! clang!
And a hush came over us, as then
Bath robes slipped off, the fighting men
Out of their corners sprang,

And in between the tangled arms and legs,
And clinches which you break, you glide
Red-haired, athletic, watchful eyed,
And like a lager keg's

Round fullness is your chest, your arms all bare,
Coatless, a figure memorable.
You should not be forgotten—well
And if it be to dare

The censure of a taste American
To celebrate your courage, wit,
I write you down what here is writ:
A referee, a man!

A judge who loved the game and whose decree
Had no taint on it, was more pure
Than much of our judicature,
Of every knavery free.

And what is here to shock or shake such nerves
As children's are, delicate women's?
There goes the short hook of Fitzsimmons,
And Thorne a moment swerves,

Then topples over, and lies quiet while
You count from one slowly to nine.
And Thorne lies there without a sign
Of life, but with a smile

After a time gets up, and reels across
The ring to his own corner, there
Flops wobbly in his corner's chair,
And wonders at his loss.

While full ten thousand cheer, and watch you shake
The master hand, the general's.
Such was our sport at Tattersall's
Before the Puritan rake

Combed through the city. Now the sport is dead,
And you are dust these several years.
And we who drift to stale careers,
And live along and tread

The old deserted ways we loved and knew,
Ask sometimes how it was a cough
Could seize upon you, take you off—
A lad as strong as you?

O SAEPE MECUM

(For E. J. S.)

Edward! you knew the city and you knew
Where dancing and where music were,
And every hall and theatre
And every green purlieu

Of gardens, where beneath the vines and trees
One might sip beer and be consoled
By music mixed with talk, behold
The summer's devotees

About the tables, idling June away.
And you knew chicory and cress,
With French or Mayonnaise could dress
A salad, growing gay

As you poured Burgundy or Rhenish wine,
Or had a sirloin brought to see
If it were ripe, the recipe
For broiling it, to dine

Thereon in fitting state, the waiter took
And bowed in admiration. Then
You snapped your silver case again
And from the holders shook

Such cigarettes as Turkish grandees smoke,
And blew the perfumed incense forth,
Descanting on our life, the worth
Of lawyers, noted folk:

Of judges, politicians, governors,
Until the dinner came at last.
And there amid the rich repast
We poor solicitors

Gloried in life, and ruddy faced would laugh
At any mishap, any fate
That we could fancy might await.
And glorifying would quaff

Incredible goblets of the quickening juice,
With blackest coffee topping all,
And afterwards a cordial—
Nothing we could abuse,

And nothing hurt us, Edward! It was well
We lived, I think, and memories stored:
For now I am a little bored
With the invariable

And settled round of nights and days wherein
I must have sleep to work, and keep
Abstemious to work and sleep—
While you long since have been

The tangled lion of a woman's hair,
Who reads you novels and the news,
And mends you, tends you, even brews
Your broth and gives you care

In these dyspeptic mornings. As for me
The cafés, gardens haunt me yet.
I go about as one who can't forget
A dead felicity—

The Bismarck, Rector's where I enter not—
The music all is changed—and where
No faces that we knew are there,
And where we are forgot.

THE DUNES OF INDIANA

Under a sky as green as a juniper berry
The yellow sands of the dunes, in clefts and curves
Run up and down, until the horizon swerves
At Michigan City, twenty miles from Gary.

Scrawls and grotesqueries of giants who laugh
At the storm's puffed cheeks, the water's pilfering hands!
Like the beat of a heart traced by a cardiograph,
Their sky-line lifts and lulls,
With the eternal pulse
Of air and the sands.

The dunes are a quilt of yellow, green and gray
Spread to the Calumet River.
Peaked by giant children who play
Circus with feet for poles. Fantastic dunes,
Protean hills, and migratory tents
Of invisible gypsies, changing with the moon's
Replenished and exhausted valleys of light.
Forests of pine and oak arise
On many a height,
And down the steep descents
Flourish and vanish from sight,
Under the restless feet of the wandering hills.
They trace in sand the changes of the skies
When the sun of evening smelts
Great towers of cloud or battlements,
And levels them, or warps
Their shapes to broken walls,
Or twisted scarps,
Or floors of emerald strewn with lion pelts. . . .
Here there are water-falls;
Lakes bright as mercury, and pools
Green as the mosses, where hepaticas
And asters scurry before the gesturing wind;
Cool hollows, scented brakes
Of bramble, fern and cane;
Great marshes where the flags leap like green snakes,

Bordered with garish gules
Of pye-weed; over whose wastes the crane
Flaps the slow rhythm of extended wings.
And on whose reeds the blackbird sings
A quaver of blue water, March's fire.

Between the feet of the dunes and the trampling troops
Of waves along the shore the sand is pounded
Into a broad mosaic firm and smooth,
Whereon are strewn old reels, between the groups
Of blackened hut and booth.
Boats lie here where they grounded,
Like skeletons in the desert ribbed and black,
Scaled with the water's scurf.
The shore is the moat between the ruined rampart
Of the dunes, whose shifting is stayed
By splotches of thickets, trees and turf,
And the invading surf.
Here phantom mists descend, and the wrack
Of autumn clouds fade into the air, when storms
Harry the water, and the sand is flayed
By the whip of the wind.
There is forever here the futile fashioning
Of hills, and their leveling;
The growth of forests and their burial;
Pools filled and rivers changed or dried
Between the spoiling winds, and the mystical
Hands of the tide!

Branches as gnarled as an ancient olive tree
Stream cherry blossoms like blown snow
Toward the blue of the lake, a hundred feet below.
They have been sand, now being blossoms drift
With the winds whose spirit cannot be
Quieted or given shrift.
By night they howl or whine,
As if they asked for words, or a sign
To tell of the sand and seeds and spores
Which build and root, bear blossoms, breed,
And change the uplands and the shores;

Destroy, make over, mend
Without use, without end
In an endless cycle of sand and seed,
Of wind and the washing of waves.
They would tell why forests grow and find their graves;
And hills glide to their sepulchers,
Even as cities sink and pass away;
Old Memphis, or old Bactria. . . .

THE GRAND RIVER MARSHES

Silvers and purples breathing in a sky
Of fiery mid-days, like a watching tiger,
Of the restrained but passionate July
Upon the marshes of the river lie,
Like the filmed pinions of a dragon fly.

A whole horizon's waste of rushes bend
Under the flapping of the breeze's wing,
Departing and revisiting
The haunts of the river twisting without end.

The torsions of the river make long miles
Of the waters of the river which remain
Coiled by the village, tortuous aisles
Of water between the rushes, which restrain
The bewildered currents in returning files,
Twisting between the greens like a blue racer,
Too hurt to leap with body or uplift
Its head while gliding, neither slow nor swift

Against the shaggy yellows of the dunes
The iron bridge's reticules
Are seen by fishermen from the Damascened lagoons.
But from the bridge, watching the little steamer
Paddling against the current up to Eastmanville,
The river loosened from the abandoned spools
Of earth and heaven wanders without will,
Between the rushes, like a silken streamer.

And two old men who turn the bridge
For passing boats sit in the sun all day,
Toothless and sleepy, ancient river dogs,
And smoke and talk of a glory passed away.
And of the ruthless sacrilege
Which mowed away the pines,
And cast them in the current here as logs,
To be devoured by the mills to the last sliver,
Making for a little hour heroes and heroines,
Dancing and laughter at Grand Haven,
When the great saws sent screeches up and whines,
And cries for more and more
Slaughter of forests up and down the river,
And along the lake's shore.

But all is quiet on the river now
As when the snow lay windless in the wood,
And the last Indian stood
And looked to find the broken bough
That told the path under the snow.
All is as silent as the spiral lights
Of purple and of gold that from the marshes rise,
Like the wings of swarming dragon flies,
Far up toward Eastmanville, where the enclosing skies
Quiver with heat; as silent as the flights
Of the crow-like smoke from shops against the glare
Of dunes and purple air,
There where Grand Haven against the sand hill lies.

The forests and the mills are gone!
All is as silent as the voice I heard
On a summer dawn
When we two fished among the river reeds.
All is as silent as the pain
In a heart that feeds
A sorrow, but does not complain.
As silent as above the bridge in this July,
Noiseless, far up in this mirror-lighted sky
Wheels aimlessly a hydroplane:
A man-bestridden dragon fly!

THE CORN

I.

On the white skeletons of poplar trees,
Or fluttering to the tips of blasted reeds,
Or searching the wind-threshed floor for seeds,
The blackbirds swarm like bees.
And with roulades liquid as water tones
They sing to the sapphire pools of March's sky,
Till the air is full of swinging xylophones. . . .
Their wings are starred with fire,
Gules of a heraldry that trumpets May,
When every slope and valley of vine and brier
Will hang like mists of moss, or the sea's spray.
Verdure upon the pastures will be drawn
In flames of green, spreading afar like dawn.
But meanwhile the yellow hills will drowse
Like lions on the meadow's floor;
And from their manes the rushing winds will pour,
Making great billows where the cattle browse,
And racing the shadows of clouds
Over the sliding plain;
And blowing new greens out of the fluttering shrouds
Of flags and stalks; and throbbing the bandaged vein
Of earth where frost serrates the stream;
Till the brown quietudes of the fields get rain.
And stir, yet sleep to dream
Of the corn, the emerald parallels of the corn
That run from the hills line after line,
As fine as grass is fine. . . .
This is the birth of the corn, the corn!

II.

The wreck of the Indian villages,
The stalks and shocks that stand,
After the ruinous rains and the pillages
Of the palefaced snow that conquered the land.
These must be broken, swept away and burned
To give this soil, this Ethiop breast
To the nursing lips of the corn.

And at night when the wind has turned
To the south, and out of the odorous darkness, like an enchanter's horn,
Breathes the desire of the hills, the earth's unrest,
Bringing near and bearing afar
The staccato croak and guttural gurgle of frogs,
Then the windrows flutter with flames, with shadows shaken
By the breeze's blankets, the signals of war
Waged for the land, for the frost forsaken
Soil of the corn, the heron flight of the fogs!
So the way is made for the share,
Which buries the meteor dazzle of the sun
Under the long uncoiling rhythm of the loam,
Strip after strip for the teeth of the harrow to tear,
Until there are miles of garden won
For the corn to come:
For the spiral whorl of the disk that rakes and hoes;
And the clocklike tick of the planter timing the rows,
From gossamer dawn till the western windows gleam
With the candle of evening, the planet of spring.
All day through, as the heavens teem
With the meadow lark, that flies the imps of the breeze,
Who leave their frolic among the fennel and grasses
To puff his wings and blow his feathers
Amid the crannies of light, the blue crevasses,
The peaks of gold where his heart upgathers
Strength for song to the cloud as it passes.

III.

Silent slide of the river,
As the corn grows,
In the June whose gold and purples quiver;
June of the lilac and the rose,
As the leaves of the corn unclose,
Furl at evening, flutter in the morning,
Lie becalmed, stretched to the heat of June,
Voluptuously at noon!
While the sun is silently adorning
Out of his fiery hair the spikelets of the tassels,
Out of his heart of flame the grains of sweet.

Every stalk is like a tall bandmaster,
With panicled cap and staff of the glistening blade,
Globed with a mimic sun whose splendor dazzles
The lower leaves that move like the marching of feet;
As the sun god beats the music faster,
Amid the interlacing lances of light and shade.
This is the sun dance, dance of the Sioux,
Singing, Come down, come down!
Come down, O Fire, from your space between the tents of heaven,
Camp fire of the Great Spirit, come and imbue
The fattening ears with fiery leaven,
Strength for the country and the town!
Pour on us blinding light,
And close our eyes that we may dream
Of men and cities, great prosperities
Of States, of ships that bless the seas;
Of temples of renewed nobilities
Built to your Amphion music with our might!
Help us to clothe, renew, redeem.
Come down, that we may use the food
Which the little folk of the soil prepared for us,
That the cycle of our servitude
To flocks that wait, yet fared for us,
And man whose toil and fortitude
Saw all and wisely cared for us,
May give him strength to struggle and reveal
The world of soul, as he has drawn the world
Of grinding stones, the kettle and the bin
To the steam-driven mill, the storing tower of steel.

IV.

1.

July over the corn!
July, of the lavender slate-sloped west of noon!
July, of the boundless miles of shimmering quiet,
The white heat concentration
Of the corn's rapt revery and castle building,
And dream of the harvest coming soon.
July, of the corn's long tongues whose diet

Is taken out of the vacuoles of torrents of splendor,
And changed to wine and honey, oil and gilding
For the swelling grains in pockets tied with silk,
And lined with satin white as milk,
Gold to be for man, the spender.
July, of the golden pollen sifting,
Dried and driven by winds shifting,
And bringing lightning, rain and hail,
Before the deep roots fail.
July, when the crow with open beak
Pants for breath in the tree by the river,
Where purple lights over the rushes quiver,
And the water snake, a ribbon of yellow and red,
Is coiled on the upturned crust of the creek.
July of the deep sea shadows between the rows,
Wherein no light is shed,
Save phosphors, and the arrow-glint
Thrown as an Indian an arrow throws!
July, when the still, hot hedges blossom with mint,
And the thirsty iron weed droops its head;
And no sound stirs the mystery of this birth,
Wrought by the earth and the sun her lover,
This breathless breath of the mating sun and earth,
Save the far-borne clang of the mower amid the clover
As it climbs the swale to the horses' tread. . . .

2.

Stillness! Save as the sun moves onward to the south,
And by unseen degrees brings August days,
When little blue mists rise around the stalks
In dawns of drenching dews that wet the drouth.
Save then, as summer silenced crows, Mohawks
Of the garnered fields, come forth to glut
Their craws, and flying flake the sky
As of the sick corn's wind-unloosened smut!
Stillness! Save for the coming of September's haze,
When the quails call, and the ecstatic jays
Rejoice to see their wings stained with the dye
Of steel-blue heavens, and scream out the cool
Colors of the Autumn filtered pool!
And save as seed birds chirp among dry weeds,

Or troops of sparrows seek the bursting pod
For glistening seeds;
Or the belated bee hums round the golden rod,
Or blooms of fall, where the sumach bleeds.
And save, as later among the surrendering ears
The huskers and the gatherers call,
Plucking the nuggets of gold, the magical
Smeltings of the sun, ere the frost sears.

V.

1.

This is America, this the Indian maize,
The Maya symbol of the power of man,
The growth that is American,
The ruler of our hopes and days.
This is the land most rich, this Illinois,
In the corn, that started with the yield
Of the Indian patch, food for a little clan,
And widened to the thousand-acred field
Around Aurora, Lincoln and Amboy,
Over the broad, tilled levels of McLean,
Logan, Menard and Fulton, Sangamon;
Where round the soil the fertile rivers run.
This the beginning of the sovereign reign
Of coal and steel, the mile long train,
Freighters, the gray slim shadows of the lakes;
The clicker, and the Dorian columned room,
Where coins and magic hieroglyphs
Symbol the corn, once scrawled on caves.
This soul awakened is the soul which makes
The Nation's soul, and wrecks or slays or saves;
Becomes the spirit of progress or enslaves
The spirit of man in freighters, storing cliffs;
Where it remains as in a desert land
The sport of devils haunting the shimmering sand!

2.

Come down, O Sun, to the corn, reveal
Souls vast as the driven mill, the bins of steel.

Help man to grow, the spiritual
Famine of his faith forestall,
And by that prosperous settlement unseal
Wisdoms and visions of undreamed of weal.
Mites of the earth for corn, and corn for cattle,
Cattle for man, and in the cyclic strength
Brought down from you, O Sun, to earth, the breast
Of all maternities: first for might in battle—
As when the corn-fed youth of all the length
Of Illinois stormed Vicksburg's deadly crest—
And next for the balanced use of wealth;
For all that gives the race to health;
For leisure, and through leisure, Beauty, Truth;
For Love, the soul of fire;
And Wisdom, soul of light;
Until this land, that never had a youth,
But in a rude routine of gold desire,
Has crawled the ground, may suddenly mutate
By long-stored life and might;
And blossom with a blossom, never known,
Evolving the soul of man, which has outgrown
The repetitions of material Fate!

STORIES IN VERSE

THE DREAM OF TASSO

O Earth that walls these prison bars—O Stones
Which shut my body in—could I be free
If these fell and the grated door which groans
For every back scourged hither oped for me?
Freedom were what to travel you, O Earth,
When my heart makes its daily agony?
And longing such as mine cannot ungirth
Its bands and its mortality o'erleap.
Our life is love unsatisfied from birth,
Our life is longing, waking or asleep,
And mine has been a vigil of quick pain.
O Leonora, thus it is I keep
Grief in my heart and weariness of brain.

How did I know these chains and bars are wrought
Of frailer stuff than space, that I could gain
In earth no respite, but a vision brought
The truth, O Leonora? It was this:
I dreamed this hopeless love, so long distraught
Was never caged, but from the first was bliss,
And moved like music from the meeting hour
To the rapt moment of the earliest kiss
Bestowed upon your hands, to gathering flower
Of lips so purely yielded, the embrace
Tender as dawn in April when a shower
Quenches with gentleness each flowering place;
So were your tears of gladness—so my hands
Which stroked your golden hair, your sunny face,
Even as flying clouds o'er mountain lands
Caress with fleeting love the morning sun.

Now I was with you, and by your commands.
Your love was mine at last completely won,

And waited but the blossom. How you sang,
Laughed, ran about your palace rooms, and none
Closed doors against me, desks and closets sprang
To my touch open, all your secrets lay
Revealed to me in gladness—and this pang
Which I had borne in bitterness day by day
Was gone, nor could I bring it back, or think
How it had been, or why—this heart so gay
In sudden sunshine could no longer link
Itself with what it was.

Look! Every room
Had blooms your hands had gathered, white and pink,
And drained from precious vases their perfume.
And fruits were heaped for me in golden bowls,
And tapestries from many an Asian loom
Were hung for me, and our united souls
Shone over treasure books—how glad you were
To listen to my epic, from the scrolls
Of Jerusalem, the holy sepulcher.
Still as a shaft of light you sat and heard
With veilèd eyes which tears could scarcely blur,
But flowed upon your cheek with every word.
And your hand reached for mine—you did not speak,
But let your silence tell how you were stirred
By love for me and wonder! What to seek
In earth and heaven more? Heaven at last
Was mine on earth, and for a sacred week
This heaven all of heaven.

So it passed
This week with you—you served me ancient wine.
We sat across a table where you cast
A cloth of chikku, or we went to dine
There in the stately room of heavy plate.
Or tiring of the rooms, the day's decline
Beheld us, by the river to await
The evening planet, where in elfin mood
You whistled like the robin to its mate,
And won its answering call. Then through the wood

We wandered back in silence hand in hand,
And reached the sacred portal with our blood
Running so swift no ripples stirred the sand
To figures of reflection.

Once again
Within your room of books, upon the stand
The reading lights are brought to us, and then
You read to me from Plato, and my heart
Breathes like a bird at rest; the world of men,
Strife, hate, are all forgotten in this art
Of life made perfect. Or when weariness
Comes over us, you dim the lamp and start
The blue light back of Dante's bust to bless
Our twilight with its beauty.

So the time
Passes too quickly—our poor souls possess
Beauty and love a moment—and our rhyme
Which captures it, creates the illusion love
Has permanence, when even at its prime
Decay has taken it from the light above,
Or darkness underneath.

I must recur
To our first sleep and all the bliss thereof.
How did you first come to me, how confer
On me your beauty? That first night it was,
The blue light back of Dante, but a blur
Of golden light our spirits, when you pass
Your hand across my brow, our souls go out
To meet each other, leave as wilted grass
Our emptied bodies. Then we grow devout,
And kneel and pray together for the gift
Of love from heaven, and to banish doubt
Of change or faithlessness. Then with a swift
Arising from the prayer you disappear.
I sleep meanwhile, you come again and lift
My head against your bosom, bringing near
A purple robe for me, and say, "Wear this,

And to your chamber go." And thus I hear,
And leave you; on my couch, where calm for bliss
I wait for you and listen, hear your feet
Whisper their secret to the tapestries
Of your ecstatic coming—O my sweet!
I touched your silken gown, where underneath
Your glowing flesh was dreaming, made complete
My rapture by upgathering, quick of breath,
Your golden ringlets loosened—and at last
Hold you in love's embrace—would it were Death! . . .
For soon 'twixt love and sleep the night was past,
And dawn cobwebbed the chamber. Then I heard
One faintest note and all was still—the vast
Spherule of heaven was pecked at by a bird,
As it were to break the sky's shell, let the light
Of morning flood the fragments scattered, stirred
By breezes of the dawn with passing night.
We woke together, heard together, thrilled
With speechless rapture! Were your spirit's plight
As mine is with this vision, had I willed
To torture you with absence? Would I save
Your spirit, if its anguish could be stilled
Only among the worms that haunt the grave?

My dream goes on a little: Day by day,
These seven days we lived together, gave
Our spirits to each other. With dismay
You watched my hour's departure. On you crept
Light shadows after moments sunny, gay.
But when the hour was come, you sat and wept,
And said to me: "I hear the rattling clods
Upon the coffin of our love." You stepped
And stood beside the casement, said "A god's
Sarcophagus this room will be as soon
As you have gone, and mine shall be the rod's
Bitterness of memory both night and noon
Amid the silence of this palace." So
I spoke and said, "If you would have the boon—
O Leonora, do I live to know
This hope too passionate made consummate?—

Yet if it be I shall return, nor go
But to return to you, and make our fate
Bound fast for life." How happy was your smile,
Your laughter soon,—and then from door to gate
I passed and left you, to be gone awhile
Around Ferrara.

In three days, it seemed,
I came again, and as I walked each mile
Counting to self—my feet lagged as I dreamed—
And said ten miles, nine miles, eight miles, at last
One mile, so many furlongs, then out-streamed
Your reading lamps all lighted for me, cast
Their yellow beams upon the midnight air.
But oh my heart which stopped and stood aghast
To see the lamp go out and note the glare
Of blue light set behind the Dante mask!
Who wore my robe of purple false and fair?
Who drank your precious vintage from the flask,
Roman and golden whence I drank so late?
Who held you in his arms and thus could ask?
Receive your love? Mother of God! What fate
Was mine beneath the darkness of that sky,
There at your door who could not leave or wait,
And heard the bird of midnight's desolate cry?
And saw at last the blue light quenched, and saw
A taper lighted in my chamber—why
This treachery, Leonora? Why withdraw
The love you gave, or eviler, lead me here,
O sorceress, before whom heaven's law
Breaks and is impotent—whose eyes no tear
Of penitence shall know, whose spirit fares
Free, without consequence, as a child could sear
Its fellow's hands with flame, or unawares,
Or with premeditation, and then laugh and turn
Upon its play. For you, light heart, no snares
Or traps of conscience wait, who thus could spurn
A love invited.

Thus about your lawn
I listened till the stars had ceased to burn.
But when I saw the imminence of the dawn,
And heard our bird cry, I could stand no more,
My heart broke and I fled and wandered on
Down through the valley by the river's shore.
For when the bird cried, did you wake with him?
Did you two gaze as we had gazed before
Upon that blissful morning? I was dim
Of thought, and spirit, by the river lay
Watching the swallows over the water skim,
And plucking leaves from weeds to turn or stay
The madness of my life's futility,
Grown blank as that terrific dawn—till day
Flooded upon me, noon came, what should be?
Where should I go? What prison chains could rest
So heavily on the spirit, as that free,
But vast and ruined world?

O arrowed breast
Of me, your Tasso! And you came and drew
The arrows out which kept the blood repressed,
And let my wounds the freer bleed: 'Twas you
By afternoon who walked upon an arm
More lordly than mine is. You stopped nor knew,
I saw him take your body lithe and warm
Close to his breast, yes, even where we had stood
Upon our day, embraced—feed on the charm
Of widened eyes and swiftly coursing blood.
I watched you walk away and disappear
In the deep verdure of the river wood,
Too faint to rise and fly, crushed by the fear
Of madness, sudden death!

This was my dream,
From which I woke and saw again the sheer
Walls of my prison, which no longer seem
The agony they did, even though the cell
Is the hard penalty and the cursed extreme
Hate in return for love. But, oh you hell,

You boundless earth to wander in and brood—
Great prison house of grief in which to dwell,
Remembering love forgotten, pride subdued,
And love desired and found and lost again.
That is the prison which no fortitude
Can suffer, and the never dying pain
From which the spacious luring of the earth
Tempts flight for spirit freedom, but in vain!

Ah Leonora! Even from our birth
We build our prisons! What are walls like these
Beside the walls of memory, or the dearth
Of hope in all this life, the agonies
Of spiritual chains and gloom? I suffer less,
Imprisoned thus, than if the memories
Of love bestowed and love betrayed should press
Round my unresting steps. And I send up
To heaven thanks that spared that bitterness,
That garden of the soul's reluctant cup!

THE STATUE

I

PSYCHE OR THE SINGER

Rhythm of arms and breasts, rapture of color and curve—
Where would you get them, you who demand and admire,
Were there never a form to stay, lest the vision swerve,
Naked before the sculptor, posing for hire?
For bread, but also to reach, as it happens with me,
The art of song, compelled as I strive to live
By giving my nakedness, all for the world to see—
Who loves the statue the poser might well forgive.

Nor despise the service which makes for the art you extol
In marble at last. How funny! Set up in my town,
Praised by the Puritans even as Psyche the soul:
I posed for Nicoli for it, and who dares to frown

On the soul in Spoon River? Only the strictest folk!
They should know as well that a soul is made like a bust,
And comes out of stairs and poverty, wine and smoke,
Smiles for hunger, fears and failure and dust!

So while Nicoli was working I read the tale
Of Eros beloved of Psyche, beloved and lost;
And how she wandered to find him, doomed to fail.
And was I to wander and fail, nor count the cost
For song never won, from studio room to room,
Wherever an artist needed my nakedness
To guide the eye of his dream, that it might assume
Through me perfection, and all of his dream express?

So when the Psyche was finished I looked and thought:
If I am never a singer, still they will praise who know
How beauty is given the world: the artist wrought
While gazing—who was the woman who helped him to throw
The passion of life in marble? And there it is I,
Body and soul, the soul of me too spied out
In all my longing and hope, for eyes to descry
Who have kindled faith and fanned the ashes of doubt!

Just then the others came in: Petri, Josef and Paul,
Expectant, laughing, ready for bread and wine.
How we were friends! Well, I had posed for them all,
Knew their gifts, and strove that they should know mine.
"Sing for us Fayfe," they cried. And I sang my best,
Better for staring the Psyche before me there.
And how do I know why Paul put hands to his breast,
Or why poor Petri buried his face in my hair?

2

NICOLI THE SCULPTOR

Here is my Psyche at last! Look Fayfe, it's love
Strained through my gazing on you as I pondered the soul.
How had I caught it and held it, around and above
Molded and pressed close the surfaces, mastered control

Of the wayard, elusive externals, the fingers that slide,
Or fumble, or miss for the moment, except I had held
Like a flame in a place of no wind, a love purified
By passion for beauty, how else had my labors excelled?

For I came to this Psyche through living, and knowing my clay,
Through flesh and through failure, the models that ruined the quest,
Making bacchantes and nymphs, where we shattered the day
With a pat on the cheek, or a kiss, an embrace in the rest,
Suspending the work, or as I resumed it transfused
Its spirit with what we had lived in the flesh with the flesh;
Degraded the flesh too, perhaps, for a strength I abused,
And the hands of me dulled, when the work needed hands that were fresh!

I knew this, had lived it, I knew that desire misleads
The eye, then the hand, not from labor alone, but as well
Lures the vision aside, and confuses the clay, as it breeds
Its shame in the clay. Or further and plainer to tell:
Let the eye stare the loins to guide—not the sculptoring hand—
But the lust that expects—where's your thought? Gone the way of desire!
So what had become of the Psyche my dreaming had planned
If never I learned that the light is the soul of the fire?

Had I chosen you, Fayfe, as model, for passion's delight,
Or a passion had risen in me to shake as with flame
My hands—where was Psyche? Yes, Fayfe, I chose you aright
For beauty of flesh. But my figure was surer of fame
For a cause that I know: You flung yourself into my art
Because you loved Petri—I knew it—and Petri loved you.
And since I had given to Laurette my word and my heart,
Our Psyche was fortuned, as even our spirits were true!

3

PETRI TO NICOLI

We were mirrors, Nicoli, if Psyches were imaged, unblest
Of the life for the clay, as the germinal cells build a man;
Divided by—Thought? and directed for eyes or a breast.
Let Swedenborg speak, who perceived plan on plan in a Plan.
Everything's matter or soul, after all it's a word.
Yet we see finer thought back of thought; and whatever we be
The vision of beauty alights in our hearts as a bird
With silent, white wings from the infinite sky or the sea!

That's the breast in the nest of the statue, the poem, the song.
But suppose that the eye were a lens, just a kodak you place
To capture the fact of a minute, the eye too would wrong
The Real, and preserve but a lithographed shade of the face.
But it's image on image in change and in motion like time
To the eye with its logic to pat and to pare like a knife,
And blend what it takes in the True, that in clay or in rhyme
Creates all the multiform meaning and movement of life.

I know why you made this, the birth of your vision I know:
It's the wonder in you if the love that one seeks can be found.
Is it's fate a misplacing, remaking delight of a woe?
Is it doubt with a lamp, the hot oil that drips, and the wound?
And then is it strife for mistrust, and the loved one away?
The pursuit of the loved one, or seeking a better to trust,
Made wiser, less trusting, and fearing the hope to obey?
Such is love in the soul in our life tending ever to dust.

Some of this you had lived with Laurette, and all of it with
Your loves by the way, till you came to this pass in the growth
Of love, as the passion of Psyche is told in the myth:
What beauty when doubt is dispelled! What soul that was loth
Made eager to cleave! What love that would serve and sustain!
Till illusion as good as eternity comes to us, made
Lovers and livers who strive, and who knowing attain—
And this is the story I see in your Psyche portrayed;

But also my Fayfe—my Fayfe all through and at core,
Whose passion makes life, and who needs no disaster to rise,
But rather a soul—is it mine that her life may be more?—
To give her its comfort and strength as misfortune denies.
Nicoli, you saw me with face hidden down in her hair:
My pang was the race, and she but the altar thereof,
Where the vision came to me, the urge to a passionate prayer
That God might relent and give love to the soul and it's love!

ST. FRANCIS AND LADY CLARE

Antonio loved the Lady Clare.
He caught her to him on the stair
And pressed her breasts and kissed her hair,
And drew her lips in his, and drew
Her soul out like a torch's flare.
Her breath came quick, her blood swirled round;
Her senses in a vortex swound.
She tore him loose and turned around,
And reached her chamber in a bound
Her cheeks turned to a poppy's hue.

She closed the door and turned the lock,
Her breasts and flesh were turned to rock.
She reeled as drunken from the shock.
Before her eyes the devils skipped,
She thought she heard the devils mock.
For had her soul not been as pure
As sifted snow, could she endure
Antonio's passion and be sure
Against his passion's strength and lure?
Lean fears along her wonder slipped.

Outside she heard a drunkard call,
She heard a beggar against the wall
Shaking his cup, a harlot's squall
Struck through the riot like a sword,
And gashed the midnight's festival.
She watched the city through the pane,

The old Silenus half insane,
The idiot crowd that drags its chain—
And then she heard the bells again,
And heard the voices with the word:

Ecco il santo! Up the street
There was the sound of running feet
From closing door and window seat,
And all the crowd turned on its way
The Saint of Poverty to greet.
He passed. And then a circling thrill,
As water troubled which was still,
Went through her body like a chill,
Who of Antonio thought until
She heard the Saint begin to pray.

And then she turned into the room
Her soul was cloven through with doom,
Treading the softness and the gloom
Of Asia's silk and Persia's wool,
And China's magical perfume.
She sickened from the vases hued
In corals, yellows, greens, the lewd
Twined dragon shapes and figures nude,
And tapestries that showed a brood
Of leopards by a pool!

Candles of wax she lit before
A pier glass standing from the floor;
Up to the ceiling, off she tore
With eager hands her jewels, then
The silken vesture which she wore.
Her little breasts so round to see
Were budded like the peony.
Her arms were white as ivory,
And all her sunny hair lay free
As marigold or celandine.

Her blue eyes sparkled like a vase
Of crackled turquoise, in her face

Was memory of the mad embrace
Antonio gave her on the stair,
And on her cheeks a salt tear's trace.
Like pigeon blood her lips were red.
She clasped her hands above her head.
Under her arms the waxlight shed
Delicate halos, where was spread
The downy growth of hair.

Such sudden sin the virgin knew
She quenched the tapers as she blew
Puff! puff! upon them, then she threw
Herself in tears upon her knees,
And round her couch the curtain drew.
She called upon St. Francis' name,
Feeling Antonio's passion maim
Her body with his passion's flame
To save her, save her from the shame
Of fancies such as these!

"Go by mad life and old pursuits,
The wine cup and the golden fruits,
The gilded mirrors, rosewood flutes,
I would praise God forevermore
With harps of gold and silver lutes."
She stripped the velvet from her couch
Her broken spirit to avouch.
She saw the devils slink and slouch,
And passion like a leopard crouch
Half mirrored on the polished floor.

Next day she found the saint and said:
I would be God's bride, I would wed
Poverty and I would eat the bread
That you for anchorites prepare,
For my soul's sake I am in dread.
Go then, said Francis, nothing loth,
Put off this gown of green snake cloth,
Put on one somber as a moth,
Then come to me and make your troth
And I will clip your golden hair.

She went and came. But still there lay,
A gem she did not put away,
A locket 'twixt her breasts, all gay
In shimmering pearls and tints of blue,
And inlay work of fruit and spray.
St. Francis felt it as he slipped
His hand across her breast and whipped
Her golden tresses ere he clipped—
He closed his eyes then as he gripped
The shears, plunged the shears through

The waterfall of living gold.
The locks fell to the floor and rolled,
And curled like serpents which unfold.
And there sat Lady Clare despoiled
Of worldly glory manifold.
She thrilled to feel him take and hide
The locket from her breast, a tide
Of passion caught them side by side.
He was the bridegroom, she the bride—
Their flesh but not their spirits foiled.

Thus was the Lady Clare debased
To sack cloth and around her waist
A rope the jeweled belt replaced.
Her feet made free of silken hose
Naked in wooden sandals cased
Went bruised to Bastia's chapel, then
They housed her in St. Damian.
And here she prayed for poor women,
And here St. Francis sought her when
His faith sank under earthly woes.

Antonio cursed St. Clare in rhyme,
And took to wine and got the lime
Of hatred on his soul, in time
Grew healed though left a little lame,
And laughed about it in his prime;
When he could see with crystal eyes

That love is a wingèd thing which flies;
Some break the wings, some let them rise
From earth like God's dove to the skies,
Diffused in heavenly flame.

IN THE CAGE

The sounds of mid-night trickle into the roar
Of morning over the water growing blue.
At ten o'clock the August sunbeams pour
A blinding flood on Michigan Avenue.

But yet the half-drawn shades of bottle green
Leave the recesses of the room
With misty auras drawn around their gloom
Where things lie indistinguished, scarcely seen.

You, standing between the window and the bed,
Are edged with rainbow colors. And I lie
Drowsy with quizzical half-open eye
Musing upon the contour of your head,
Watching you comb your hair,
Clothed in a corset waist and skirt of silk,
Tied with white braid above your slender hips,
Which reaches to your knees and makes your bare
And delicate legs by contrast white as milk.
And as you toss your head to comb its tresses
They flash upon me like long strips of sand
Between a moonlit sea, pale as your hand,
And a red sun that on a high dune stresses
Its sanguine heat.

And then at times your lips,
Protruding half unconscious, half in scorn,
Engage my eyes while looking through the morn
At the clear oval of your brow brought full
Over the sovereign largeness of your eyes;
Or at your breasts that shake not as you pull

The comb through stubborn tangles, only rise
Scarcely perceptible with breath or sighs,
Firm, unmaternal like a young Bacchante's,
Or at your nose profoundly dipped like Dante's
Over your chin that softly melts away.

Now you seem fully under my heart's sway.
I have slipped through the magic of your mesh
Freed once again and strengthened by your flesh,
You seem a weak thing for a strong man's play.
Yet I know now that we shall scarce have parted
When I shall think of you half heavy hearted.
I know our partings. You will faintly smile
And look at me with eyes that have no guile,
Or have too much, and pass into the sphere
Where you keep independent life meanwhile.
How do you live without me, is the fear?
You do not lean upon me, ask my love, or wonder
Of other loves I may have hidden under
These casual renewals of our love.
And if I loved you I should lie in flame,
And go about re-murmuring your name,
And these are things a man should be above.

And as I lie here on the imminent brink
Of soul's surrender into your soul's power,
And in the white light of the morning hour,
I see what life would be if we should link
Our lives together in a marriage pact:
For we should walk along a boundless tract
Of perfect hell; but your disloyalty
Would be of spirit, for I have not won,
Mastered and bound your spirit unto me.
And if you had a lover in the way
I have you it would not by half betray
My love as does your vague and chainless thought,
Which wanders, soars or vanishes, returns,
Changes, astonishes, or chills or burns,
Is unresisting, plastic, freely wrought
Under my hands, yet to no unison

Of my life and of yours. Upon this brink
I watch you now and think
Of all that has been preached or sung or spoken
Of woman's tragedy in woman's fall;
And all the pictures of a woman broken
By man's superior strength.

And there you stand
Your heart and life as firmly in command
Of your resolve as mine is, knowing all
Of man, the master, and his power to harm,
His rulership of spheres material,
Bread, customs, rules of fair repute—
What are they all against your slender arm?
Which long since plucked the fruit
Of good and evil, and of life at last,
And now of Life. For dancing you have cast
Veil after veil of ideals or pretense
With which men clothe the being feminine
To satisfy their lordship or their sense
Of ownership, and hide the things of sin—
You have thrown them aside veil after veil;
And there you stand unarmored, weirdly frail,
Yet strong as nature, making comical
The poems and the tales of woman's fall. . . .
You nod your head, you smile, I feel the air
Made by the closing door. I lie and stare
At the closed door. One, two, your tufted steps
Die on the velvet of the outer hall.
You have escaped. And I would not pursue.
Though we are but caged creatures, I and you—
A male and female tiger in a zoo.
For I shall wait you. Life himself will track
Your wanderings and bring you back,
And shut you up again with me and cage
Our love and hatred and our silent rage.

A LADY

She sleeps beneath a canopy of carnation silk,
Embroidered with Venetian lace,
Between linens that crush in the hand
Soft as down.
Waking, she looks through a window
Curtained with carnation silk,
Embroidered with Venetian lace.
The walls are hung with velvet
Embossed with a *fleur de lis*,
And around her is the silence of richness,
Where footfalls are like exhalations
From carpets of moss.
Little clocks tinkle.
Medallions priceless as jewels
Lie by jars suspiring like coals of fire.
And a maid prepares the bath,
Tincturing delicious water with exquisite essences.
And she is served with coffee
In cups as thin as petals,
Sitting amid pillows that breathe
The souls of freesia!

All things are hers:
Fishes from all seas,
Fruits from all climes.
The city lies at her command,
And is summoned by buttons
Which are pressed for her.
Noiselessly feet move on many floors,
Serving her.
Wheels that turn under coaches
Of crystal and ebony,
And yachts dreaming in strange waters,
And wings—all are hers!
And she is free:
Her husband comes and goes
From his suite below hers.
She never sees him,
Nor knows his ways, nor his days.

But she is very weary,
And all alone amid her servants,
And guests that come and go.
Her lips are red,
Her skin is soft and smooth—
But the page blurs before her eyes.
Her eyelids are languid,
And droop from weariness,
Though she will not rest
From the long pursuit of love!
Her hair is white;
The skin of her faultless neck
Edges in creases
As she turns her perfect head.
And the days dawn and die.
What day that dawns will bring her love?
And day by day she waits for the dawn
Of a new life, a great love!

But every morning brings its remembrance
Of the increasing years that are gone.
And every evening brings its fear
Of death which must come,
Until her nerves are shaken
Like a woman's hair in the wind—
What must be done?
Some one tells her that God is love.
And when the fears come
She says to self over and over,
"God is love! God is love!
All is well."
And she wins a little oblivion,
Through saying "God is love,"
From the truth in heart which cries:
"Love is life,
Love is a lover,
And love is God!"

She is a flower
Which the spring has nourished,
And the summer exhausted.

Fall is at hand.
Weird zephyrs stir her leaves and blossoms;
And she says to herself, "It is not fall,
For God is love!"

My poor flower!
May this therapy ease you into sleep,
And the folding of jewelless hands!
You are beginning to be sick
Of the incurable disease of age,
And the weariness of futile flesh!

IN THE CAR

We paused to say good-by,
As we thought for a little while,
Alone in the car, in the corner
Around the turn of the aisle.

A quiver came in your voice,
Your eyes were sorrowful too;
'Twas over—I strode to the doorway,
Then turned to wave an adieu.

But you had not come from the corner,
And though I had gone so far,
I retraced, and faced you coming
Into the aisle of the car.

You stopped as one who was caught
In an evil mood by surprise.
I want to forget, I am trying
To forget the look in your eyes.

Your face was blank and cold,
Like Lot's wife turned to salt.
I suddenly trapped and discovered
Your soul in a hidden fault.

IN MICHIGAN

Your eyes were tearless and wide,
And your wide eyes looked on me
Like a Mænad musing murder,
Or the mask of Melpomene.

And there in a flash of lightning
I learned what I never could prove:
That your heart contained no sorrow,
And your heart contained no love.

And my heart is light and heavy,
And this is the reason why:
I am glad we parted forever,
And sad for the last good-by.

IN MICHIGAN

You wrote:
"Come over to Saugatuck
And be with me on the warm sand,
And under cool beeches and aromatic cedars."
And just then no one could do a thing in the city
For the lure of far places, and something that tugged
At one's heart because of a June sky,
And stretches of blue water,
And a warm wind blowing from the south.
What could I do but take a boat
And go to meet you?

And when to-day is not enough,
But you must live to-morrow also;
And when the present stands in the way
Of something to come,
And there is but one you would see,
All the interval of waiting is a wall.
And so it was I walked the landward deck
With flapping coat and hat pulled down;
And I sat on the leeward deck and looked
At the streaming smoke of the funnels,
And the far waste of rhythmical water,
And at the gulls flying by our side.

There was music on board and dancing,
But I could not take part.
For above all there was the bluest sky,
And around us the urge of magical distances.
And just because you were in the violins,
And in everything, and were wholly the world
Of sense and sight,
It was too much. One could not live it
And make it all his own—
It was too much.
And I wondered where the rest could be going,
Or what they thought of water and sky
Without knowing you.

But at four o'clock there was a rim,
A circled edge of rainbow color
Which suspired, widened and narrowed under your gaze:
It was the phantasy of straining eyes,
Or land—and it was land.
It was distant trees.
And then it was dunes, bluffs of yellow sand.
We began to wonder how far it was—
Five miles, or ten miles—
Surely only five miles!—
But at last whatever it was we swung to the end.
We rounded the lighthouse pier,
Almost before we knew.
We slowed our speed in a dizzy river of black,
We drifted softly to dock.

I took the ferry,
I crossed the river,
I ran almost through the little batch
Of fishermen's shacks.
I climbed the winding road of the hill,
And dove in a shadowy quiet
Of paths of moss and dancing leaves,
And straight stretched limbs of giant pines
On patches of sky.
I ran to the top of the bluff

Where the lodge-house stood.
And there the sunlit lake burst on me
And wine-like air.
And below me was the beach
Where the serried lines of hurrying water
Came up like rank on rank of men
And fell with a shout on the rocks!
I plunged, I stumbled, I ran
Down the hill,
For I thought I saw you,
And it was you, you were there!
And I shall never forget your cry,
Nor how you raised your arms and cried,
And laughed when you saw me.
And there we were with the lake,
And the sun with his ruddy search-light blaze
Stretching back to lost Chicago.
The sun, the lake, the beach, and ourselves
Were all that was left of Time,
All else was lost.

You were making a camp.
You had bent from the bank a cedar bough
And tied it down.
And over it flung a quilt of many colors,
And under it spread on the voluptuous silt
Gray blankets and canvas pillows.
I saw it all in a glance.
And there in dread of eyes we stood
Scanning the bluff and the beach,
Lest in the briefest touch of lips
We might be seen.

For there were eyes, or we thought
There were eyes, on the porch of the lodge,
And eyes along the forest's rim on the hill,
And eyes on the shore.
But a minute passed, there was no sun,
Only a star that shone like a match which lights
To a blue intenseness amid the glow of a hearth.

And we sat on the sand as dusk came down
In a communion of silence and low words.
Till you said at last: "We'll sup at the lodge,
Then say good night to me and leave,
As if to stay overnight in the village.
But instead make a long detour through the wood
And come to the shore through that ravine,
Be here at the tent at midnight."

And so I did.
I stole through echoless ways,
Where no twigs broke and where I heard
My heart beat like a watch under a pillow.
And the whippoorwills were singing.
And the sound of the surf below me
Was the sound of silver-poplar leaves
In a wind that makes no pause. . . .
I hurried down the steep ravine,
And a bat flew up at my feet from the brush
And crossed the moon.
To my left was the lighthouse,
And black and deep purples far away,
And all was still.
Till I stood breathless by the tent
And heard your whispered welcome,
And felt your kiss.

Lovers lay at midnight
On roofs of Memphis and Athens
And looked at tropical stars
As large as golden beetles.
Nothing is new, save this,
And this is always new.
And there in your tent
With the balm of the midnight breeze
Sweeping over us,
We looked at one great star
Through a flap of your many-colored tent,
And the eternal quality of rapture
And mystery and vision flowed through us.

Next day we went to Grand Haven,
For my desire was your desire,
Whatever wish one had the other had.
And up the Grand River we rowed,
With rushes and lily pads about us,
And the sand hills back of us,
Till we came to a quiet land,
A lotus place of farms and meadows.
And we tied our boat to Schmitty's dock,
Where we had a dinner of fish.
And where, after resting, to follow your will
We drifted back to Spring Lake.
And under a larger moon,
Now almost full,
Walked three miles to The Beeches,
By a winding country road,
Where we had supper.
And afterwards a long sleep,
Waking to the song of robins.

And that day I said:
There are wild places, blue water, pine forests,
There are apple orchards, and wonderful roads
Around Elk Lake—shall we go?
And we went, for your desire was mine.
And there we climbed hills,
And ate apples along the shaded ways,
And rolled great boulders down the steeps
To watch them splash in the water.
And we stood and wondered what was beyond
The farther shore two miles away.
And we came to a place on the shore
Where four great pine trees stood,
And underneath them wild flowers to the edge
Of sand so soft for naked feet.
And here, for not a soul was near,
We stripped and swam far out, laughing, rejoicing.
Rolling and diving in those great depths
Of bracing water under a glittering sun.

There were farm houses enough
For food and shelter.
But something urged us on.
One knows the end and dreads the end,
Yet seeks the end.
And you asked, "Is there a town near?
Let's see a town."
So we walked to Traverse City
Through cut-over land and blasted
Trunks and stumps of pine,
And by the side of the desolate hills.
But when we got to Traverse City
You were not content, nor was I.
Something urged us on.
Then you thought of Northport
And of its Norse and German fishermen,
And its quaint piers where they smoke fish.
So we drove for thirty miles
In a speeding automobile
Over hills, around sudden curves, into warm coverts,
Or hollows, sometimes at the edge of the Bay,
Again on the hill,
From where we could see Old Mission
Amid blues and blacks, across a score of miles of the Bay,
Waving like watered silk under the moon!
And by meadows of clover newly cut,
And by peach orchards and vineyards.
But when we came to the little town
Already asleep, though it was but eight o'clock,
And only a few drowsy lamps
With misty eyelids shone from a store or two,
I said, "Do you see those twinkling lights?
That's Northport Point, that's the Cedar Cabin—
Let's go to the Cedar Cabin."
And so we crossed the Bay
Amid great waves in a plunging launch,
And a roaring breeze and a great moon,
For now the moon was full.

So here was the Cedar Cabin
On a strip of land as wide as a house and lawn,

And on one side Lake Michigan,
And on one side the Bay.
There were distances of color all around,
And stars and darknesses of land and trees,
And at the point the lighthouse.
And over us the moon,
And over the balcony of our room
All of these, where we lay till I slept,
Listening to the water of the Lake,
And the water of the Bay.
And we saw the moon sink like a red bomb,
And we saw the stars change
As the sky wheeled. . . . . .
Now this was the end of the earth,
For this strip of land
Ran out to a point no larger than one of the stumps
We saw on the desolate hills.
And moreover it seemed to dive under,
Or waste away in a sudden depth of water.
And around it was a swirl,
To the north the bounding waves of the Lake,
And to the south the Bay which seemed the Lake.
But could we speak of it, even though
I saw your eyes when you thought of it?
A sigh of wind blew through the rustic temple
When we saw this symbol together,
And neither spoke.
But that night, somewhere in the beginning of drowsiness,
You said: "There is no further place to go,
We must retrace."
And I awoke in a torrent of light in the room,
Hearing voices and steps on the walk:
I looked for you,
But you had arisen.
Then I dressed and searched for you,
But you were gone.
Then I stood for long minutes
Looking at a sail far out at sea,
And departed too.

SPRING LAKE

Βῆ δε' κατ' Ουλύμπιο καρήνων χωομενος κῆρ.
—*Iliad.*

I

Some thought a bomb hit
Trotter's garage.
Some thought a comet
Blew up the Lodge.
Milem Alkire was riding in a Dodge,
Saw the water splashing, and a great light flashing,
And a thousand arrows flying from the heaven's glow;
And heard a great banging and a howling clanging
Of a bull-hide's string to a monstrous bow.

II

Milem Alkire became a changed man,
So the thing began, guess it if you can.
He turned in an hour from a man who was sour
To a singing, dancing satyr like Pan.
He hobbled and clattered as if nothing mattered
Down in his cellar for any strange fellow,
Bringing up the bottles, clinking, winking,
For the crowd that was drinking.
All against the statutes in such case provided.
Drew well water to cool the wine off,
Polished up the glasses with a humorous cough.
Milem Alkire for years had resided
A quiet, pious, law abiding citizen
Turned in an hour to a wag who derided
The feelings of the people, the village steeple,
And the ways that befit a man—
This Spring Lake citizen.

III

And about the time
That Milem Alkire
Became a wine seller,
And begetter of crime,

With parties on his lawn
From mid-night to dawn,
Making the wine free
Under the pine tree,
Starling Turner's wife ran away,
A woman who before was anything but gay.
Never had a lover in her life, so they say,
But like other clay, had the longing to stray.
She saw a cornet player,
An idler, a strayer,
And left her husband furious threatening to slay her,
And cursing musicians who have no honest missions.
So Starling Turner, a belated learner
Of life as music, laughter, folly,
Grew suddenly jolly, forgot his melancholy,
Became a dancer and rounded up the fiddlers,
Got up a contest of fifty old fiddlers,
With prizes for fiddling from best to middling:
A set of fine harness for the best piece of fiddling.
Work stopped, business stopped, all went mad,
Mad about music, the preachers looked sad
For music, the like of which the village never had. . . .
The children in the street were shockingly bad,
And danced like pixies scantily clad;
Knocked away the crutches from venerable hobblers,
Threw pebbles at the windows of grocers and cobblers,
Made fun of the preachers, the grammar school teachers,
Stole spring chickens and turkey gobblers,
Roasted hooked geese in front of the police.
Till the quidnuncs decided it wasn't any use,
The devil had let a thousand devils loose.

IV

Then folks began to read old books forbidden.
Carpenters orated and expatiated
On Orphic doctrines and wisdoms long hidden.
A Swede who couldn't speak began to talk Greek.
There were meetings in the park from dawn to dark.
And wild talk of razing the village, effacing
The plain little houses and the town replacing

With carved stone, columns and temples gracing
Gardens and vistas the water front embracing.
And others would create a brand new state.
So fire broke out in the strangest places.
The belated traveler beheld elfin faces
Springing from nothing, to vanish in a second.
Potatoes unthrown went whizzing round corners.
Voices were heard and white fingers beckoned,
Till all the wise ones, doubters and scorners
Although they winced, in some way evinced
That their minds were convinced.
Something was wrong,
The evidence was strong,
The air was full of song:
You woke out of sleep and heard a violin,
A harp or a horn;
And rose up and followed the sound growing thin
At the break of morn.

V

Music, music, music was blown
Over the waters, out of the woodlands,
Grassy valleys and sunny meadowlands
In the mid spaces, tone on tone.
The pasturing flocks were sleeker grown
And multiplied in a way unknown. . . .
And little Alice bright of eye
Dreamed and began to prophesy:
And said the strayer, the cornet player,
Who took Starling Turner's wife away,
Is coming back at an early day:
Look out, said Alice, to Imogene,
Red-lipped, bright-eyed, turned eighteen,
You have danced too much on the village green.
Look out for the cornet player, I mean.
I know who he is for my eyes are keen.
Your blood is desiring, but yet serene.
I know his face and his bright desire,
Laurel leaves are around his brow;
He carries a horn, but sometimes a lyre.
His eyes are blue and his face is fire.

Look out, said Alice, his touch is dire,
Keep to the house, or the church's spire.

VI

And what was next? The girl disappeared.
As Alice feared, no fate interfered.
A posse collected, hunted and peered,
Raced through the night till their eyes were bleared,
And looked for Imogene, cried and cheered
When a clew was found, or a doubt was cleared.
A posse with pitchforks, scythes and axes,
Shotguns, pistols, knives and rifles,
Hunts for Imogene, never relaxes,
Runs over meadows for luring trifles:
The wave of grain or a weed that tosses;
And curse and say what a terrible loss is
Come to Spring Lake: a wife's enticed,
And then this fairest maid is abducted.
Why are the innocent sacrificed?
We are a people well conducted.
What is the curse, or is it the war?
Why is it every one here is housing
Fiddlers, idlers, fancy dancers.
At Milem Alkire's why carousing;
Everything that the good abhor
In lovers and romancers?
The world is mad, the village is mad,
Even the cattle bellow and run.
Old maid, young maid, man and lad
Have eaten of something half insane;
Such antics never before were done,
And never it seems may be again
Under the shining sun.
And now comes villainy out of the fun.
Come with the torch, come with the halter,
Gather the posse, stay nor falter,
Catch the scoundrel who spoiled our peace,
And hang him up in the maple tree's
Highest branch. For what is the law
If it can't slip the noose and draw
This minstrel man to a thing of awe?

VII

Then the pastor said: Talk of the gallows:
Is just the thing, for it's righteous malice;
And we need hearts with piety callous
For work like this, I might say salus
Populi, but bright-eyed Alice
Can help us in this matter kinetic
Who has grown psychic and grown prophetic,
Sees round corners, and looks through doors,
And spies old treasure under the floors.
And I have heard that Alice averred,
The cornet player's the self-same bird
Who enticed the wife of Starling Turner,
And kidnaped Imogene; he will spurn her
Later for some one else, unless we
Capture and hang the vile sojourner;
So now for Alice, he said, and bless me!

VIII

Alice came out to lead the mob,
Catch the scoundrel and finish the job.
Down to Fruitport before it is dark
Come, said Alice, Joan of Arc.
Farmers, butchers, cobblers, dentists,
Lawyers, doctors, preachers, druggists
Hustled and ran in the afternoon,
Following Alice who led the way
Chanting an ancient roundelay,
A wild and haunting tune.
Her hair streamed over her little shoulders
Back in the wind for all beholders.
And her little feet were as swift and white
As waves that dance in the noonday light.
Youths were panting, middle-aged men
Had to rest and resume again.
She ran the posse almost to death,
All were gasping and out of breath.
At last they halted upon the ridge.
There! said Alice, beside the bridge
Under its shadow. Look, he's there

Weaving lilies in Imogene's hair;
His musical instrument laid aside
Now he has charmed the maiden pride
Of Imogene, who is not his bride,
Come, said Alice, before they hide.

IX

They ran from the ridge.
Looked under the bridge.
There! he escapes, said Alice, the fay.
Where? Howled the mob! Which is the way?
There's Imogene wrapped as if in a trance,
Said the preacher, there where the waters dance.
I saw as it were a shaft of light
Steal from her side, vanish from sight.
The cobbler said: it was like a comet;
The druggist, water by a bomb hit.
Yes, said the lawyer, I heard a splashing
And saw a light as of waters flashing,
Or a thousand arrows of splendor flying.
I heard a booming, banging, clanging
Of a bull's hide string, it was terrifying.
No, said Alice, this form of light,
That stole away and vanished from sight,
That was the fellow, said Alice, the sprite.
Go after him, follow through meadow and hollow
The God Apollo, the great Apollo!

X

They went to Imogene then and took her,
Spoke to her, slapped her hands and shook her,
Asked her who it was that forsook her,
Why she had left her home and wandered,
What was the dream she sat and pondered.
And Imogene said, it's a dream of dread,
Now that the glory of it is fled.
Where am I now, where is my lover,
God of my dreams, singer and rover.
I danced with the muses in flowering meadows;
We lay on lawns of whispering shadows;

We walked by moonlight where pine trees stood
Feathery clear in the crystal flood;
He gave me honey and grapes for food.
We rode on the clouds and counted the stars.
He sang me songs of the ancient wars.
He told me of cities and temples builded
Under his hand, we waded rivers
By star-light and by sun-light gilded;
By shades where the green of the laurel shivers.
But it came to this, and this I see:
Life is beautiful if you are free,
If you live yourself like the laurel tree.

XI

Then some of them teased her, the posse seized her,
They tore the lilies out of her hair.
Back to the village, exclaimed the preacher,
Back to your home, exclaimed the teacher.
You've been befooled, said Alice, the fay.
And back went Imogene in despair,
Weeping all the way!

ULYSSES

Settled to evenings before the doorway
With Telemachus, who sat at his knee,
"Why did you stay so long from Ithaca,
Leaving my mother Penelope?"

The eyes of the hero rolled and wandered,
Thinking of Scylla and Sicily.
"That's a hard question," answered Ulysses,
"Harder, if answered, for you to see.

"There was the Cyclops, there was Æolus,
There were the Sirens, and Hades for me;
Apollo's oxen, Hades' horrors,
Circe, and then Ogygia.

"All these after the war, Telemachus—
Too long a tale, as you will agree.
The bards must write it, when you are older
Read till the gray hairs give you the key

"Of the wonder and richness that were your father's
Life in the war, the long way home.
No man has lived, as I, Telemachus,
None ever will live in the days to come

"A life that followed the paths and hollows
Of Time, the wayward ways of the streams,
That flow round earth, the winds and waters
Of passion, wisdom, thought and dreams.

"There are two things, my boy, and only
Two in the world, remember this:
One thing is men, the other women,
And after the two of them nothing is.

"I have known men as king and warrior,
Known them as liegemen, spears of the line.
Good enough lamps for workaday darkness—
They are not food, they are not wine;

"They are not heat that stirs the secret
Core of the seed of a man, be sure.
And I, Ulysses, needed the planets,
And suns of the spring to live, mature."

"What do you mean?" asked Telemachus,
"And, say is it true you lost eight years
Away from Ithaca, me and my mother
Because of a certain Calypso's tears?"

The eyes of the hero rolled and wandered.
"There now, my boy, you have the truth.
I'll try to tell you perhaps you'll get it
In spite of your filial love and your youth.

"First, understand there are two things only;—
One is women, the other men.
And men I knew before and at Troyland,
And searched their hearts again and again.

"What do you get? Secrets of cunning,
Cruelty, strength, and much that you use
In the battle with them; but what's a woman?
She is the mother, she is the Muse

"That leads and lifts to life—Telemachus
How can I tell you?—have a care!
Young men seize on the words of wisdom,
And find their hands in a silken snare,

"Hearing blindly, seeing literally,
What is a sword, a lamp, a shield?
Touch and learn, the name is only
The shell wherein the thing is concealed."

"What do you mean?" asked Telemachus.
"What do I mean? Attend to me!
I'll try to tell you, telling a story
Of the island called Ogygia.

"I know women—how shall I tell you?
Women are good, and good is wine.
Yet how to tell the wine and women
That turn their adorers into swine.

"You must have aid of Hermes, swiftness
Of spirit and sense to tell them apart;
How to be strong, how to be tender,
How to surrender and keep your heart.

"Easy for me to baffle Circe,
Easy the Sirens to slip—just wax!
I steered for Ithaca, you and your mother,
Isle to isle on the ocean's tracks,

"Until I came and saw Calypso.
Son, you would be with Calypso yet.
It takes a hero suppled in flame
To see Calypso, and leave, forget

Face and voice enough to leave her,
Spurn her promises, turn from her tears,
Come to Ithaca with this doorway,
Age that hovers, the little years."

"What do you mean?" asked Telemachus.
"Live and learn," Ulysses replied.
"Calypso promised me youth eternal
If I would stay and make her my bride."

"And why not stay?" asked Telemachus
"To have her for wife, if not a youth
Eternal given you?" "Boy of me, listen
Now for the core of the deepest truth:

"We dined in grottoes of blooming ivy;
We supped in halls of cedar and gold;
We slept on balconies, sapphire tented—
But even I found this growing old.

"I saw her beauty bare by star light,
And by the sea in the sun, and stoled
In silk as white as snow on Parnassus—
But even I found this growing old.

"Her tresses smelt of the blooms of Hymettus,
Her breasts were cymbals sweet to behold;
Her voice was a harp of pearl and silver—
But even I found this growing old.

"Her lips were like the flame of a taper
Scented and musical, as she would fold
White arms over the brawn of my shoulders—
But even I found this growing old.

"She promised me love and youth forever,
So long as the sun and the planets rolled.
I knew they were gifts she could not give me,
Empty promises, too, grow old.

"And even if given, why forever
Live the things that have grown enough?
She loved me, wonderful Calypso.
But what is love? It is only love.

"And the salt of a man turns to his doorway,
He makes his will for his blood at the end.
My boy, that's why I left Calypso
And came to you—do you comprehend?

"To sit unshorn, and clothed as I choose,
Talk with the swineherd, potter or shirk,
Babble at ease, my boy, with your mother
Around the house at rest or at work.

"And you must not forget, Telemachus,
In order to have immortality
It had to be with Calypso—therefore
I came to you and Penelope,

"Who soon will leave me, at best, or else
I'll leave you for the Isles of the Blest.
I find this doorway good, Telemachus,
As a place to dream and a place to rest."

"I do not understand, Ulysses,
Father of me. At first the call
Of the blood, I thought, would hasten you homeward.
And now I wonder you came at all

"Here to Ithaca. What, my father,
Is here but my mother growing old;
Aged Lærtes, Telemachus—
What of Calypso's hair of gold?

"What of the island, what of the feasting,
What of her kisses, were it I
I'd spurn eternal youth, as a mortal
Live with Calypso until I should die."

"I have no doubt," said the many minded
Great Ulysses. "It's plain to see
You are a boy yet. When is supper?
Go ask your mother Penelope."

THE NEGRO WARD

Scarce had I written: it were best
To crush this love, to give you up,
Drink at one draught the bitter cup,
And kill this new life in my breast,
Than Parker's breathing seemed to give
Ominous sound the end was near.
I did so want this man to live—
This negro soldier, dear.

'Twas three in the morning, all was still
But Parker's rattle in the throat.
Outside I heard the whippoorwill.
The new moon like an Indian boat
Hung just above the darkened grove,
Where you and I had pledged our love,
When you were here. Such precious hours,
Such fleeting moments then were ours . . .
Alone here in the silent ward,
With Parker dying, I was scared.
His breath came short, his lips were blue.
I asked him: "Is there something more,
Parker, that I can do for you?"
"Please hold my hand," he said. Before
I took it, it was growing cold—
Death, how quick it comes!

Then next I seemed to hear the drums—
For I had fainted for his eyes
That stared with such a wide surprise,
As the lids fell apart they stared,
As if they saw what to behold
Had startled his poor soul which fared
Where it would not. I heard the drums,
The bugle next, lay there so faint
With Parker's eyes still in my view,
Like bubble motes which flit and paint
Themselves upon the heaven's blue.
An orderly had mailed meanwhile
That letter, to you, there I lay
Too weak to write again, unsay
What I had written.

Down the aisle,
Between our beds a step I heard,
A voice: "Our order's here, we leave
In half an hour for France." I stirred
Like a dead thing, could scarce conceive
What tragedy was come. No chance
To write you or to telegraph.
In twelve hours more, as in a trance
I looked from Ellis Island, where
My chums could gayly talk and laugh.
In two hours more we sailed for France.
All this was hard, but still to bear
The knowledge of you, your despair,
Or change, or bitterness, if you thought
That letter came from me, was wrought
Out of a heart that could not stake
Its own blood for your sake.

I will come back to you at length
If I but live and have the strength.
How will you like me with hair white,
And wasted cheeks, deep lined and pale?
It all began that dreadful night

Of Parker's death, the strain and fright,
The letter it seemed best to write—
From then to now I have been frail.
Our ship just missed a submarine,
And here the hardships, gas-gangrene,
The horrors and the deaths have stripped
My life of everything. Is it to prove
For duty, you, though bloody-lipped,
And fallen my unconquerable love
For country and for you through all,
Whatever fate befall?

What is my soul's great anguish for?
For what this tragedy of war?
For what the fate that says to us:
Part hands and be magnanimous?
For what the judgment which decrees
The mother love in me to cease?
For separation, hopeless miles
Of land and water us between?
For what the devil force that smiles
At man's immedicable pain?

I have not lost my faith in God.
Life has grown dark, I only say:
Dear God, my feet have lost the way.
Religion, wisdom do not give
A place to stand, a space to live.
I have not lost my faith in love,
That somehow it must rise above
The clouds of earth, I still can rest
In dreams sometimes upon your breast.
But, oh, it seems sometimes a play
Where gods are picking a bouquet:
The blossom of war, my soul and yours
More fragrant grown as it endures. . . .

BALLAD OF LAUNCELOT AND ELAINE

It was a hermit on Whitsunday
That came to the Table Round.
"King Arthur, wit ye by what Knight
May the Holy Grail be found?"

"By never a Knight that liveth now;
By none that feasteth here."
King Arthur marvelled when he said,
"He shall be got this year."

Then uprose brave Sir Launcelot
And there did mount his steed,
And hastened to a pleasant town
That stood in knightly need.

Where many people him acclaimed,
He passed the Corbin pounte,
And there he saw a fairer tower
Than ever was his wont.

And in that tower for many years
A dolorous lady lay,
Whom Queen Northgalis had bewitched,
And also Queen le Fay.

And Launcelot loosed her from those pains,
And there a dragon slew.
Then came King Pelles out and said,
"Your name, brave Knight and true?"

"My name is Pelles, wit ye well,
And King of the far country;
And I, Sir Knight, am cousin nigh
To Joseph of Armathie."

"I am Sir Launcelot du Lake."
And then they clung them fast;
And yede into the castle hall
To take the king's repast.

Anon there cometh in a dove
By the window's open fold,
And in her mouth was a rich censer,
That shone like Ophir gold.

And therewithal was such savor
As bloweth over sea
From a land of many colored flowers,
And trees of spicery.

And therewithal was meat and drink,
And a damsel passing fair,
Betwixt her hands of tulip-white,
A golden cup did bear.

"O, Jesu," said Sir Launcelot,
"What may this marvel mean?"
"That is," said Pelles, "richest thing
That any man hath seen."

"O, Jesu," said Sir Launcelot,
"What may this sight avail?"
"Now wit ye well," said King Pelles,
"That was the Holy Grail."

Then by this sign King Pelles knew
Elaine his fair daughter
Should lie with Launcelot that night,
And Launcelot with her.

And that this twain should get a child
Before the night should fail,
Who would be named Sir Galahad,
And find the Holy Grail.

Then cometh one hight Dame Brisen
With Pelles to confer,
"Now, wit ye well, Sir Launcelot
Loveth but Guinevere."

"But if ye keep him well in hand,
The while I work my charms,
The maid Elaine, ere spring of morn,
Shall lie within his arms."

Dame Brisen was the subtlest witch
That was that time in life;
She was as if Beëlzebub
Had taken her to wife.

Then did she cause one known of face
To Launcelot to bring,
As if it came from Guinevere,
Her wonted signet ring.

"By Holy Rood, thou comest true,
For well I know thy face.
Where is my lady?" asked the Knight,
"There in the Castle Case?"

"'Tis five leagues scarcely from this hall,"
Up spoke that man of guile.
"I go this hour," said Launcelot,
"Though it were fifty mile."

Then sped Dame Brisen to the king
And whispered, "An we thrive,
Elaine must reach the Castle Case
Ere Launcelot arrive."

Elaine stole forth with twenty knights,
And a goodly company.
Sir Launcelot rode fast behind,
Queen Guinevere to see.

Anon he reached the castle door.
Oh! fond and well deceived.
And there it seemed the queen's own train
Sir Launcelot received.

"Where is the queen?" quoth Launcelot,
"For I am sore bestead."
"Have not such haste," said Dame Brisen,
"The queen is now in bed."

"Then lead me thither," saith he,
"And cease this jape of thine."
"Now sit thee down," said Dame Brisen,
"And have a cup of wine."

"For wit ye not that many eyes
Upon you here have stared;
Now have a cup of wine until
All things may be prepared."

Elaine lay in a fair chamber,
'Twixt linen sweet and clene.
Dame Brisen all the windows stopped,
That no day might be seen.

Dame Brisen fetched a cup of wine,
And Launcelot drank thereof.
"No more of flagons," saith he,
"For I am mad for love."

Dame Brisen took Sir Launcelot
Where lay the maid Elaine.
Sir Launcelot entered the bed chamber
The queen's love for to gain.

Sir Launcelot kissed the maid Elaine,
And her cheeks and brows did burn;
And then they lay in other's arms
Until the morn's underne.

Anon Sir Launcelot arose
And toward the window groped,
And then he saw the maid Elaine
When he the window oped.

"Ah, traitoress," saith Launcelot,
And then he gat his sword,
"That I should live so long and now
Become a knight abhorred."

"False traitoress," saith Launcelot,
And then he shook the steel.
Elaine skipped naked from the bed
And 'fore the knight did kneel.

"I am King Pelles' own daughter,
And thou art Launcelot,
The greatest knight of all the world
This hour we have begot."

"Oh, traitoress Brisen," cried the knight,
"Oh, charmed cup of wine;
That I this treasonous thing should do
For treasures such as thine."

"Have mercy," saith maid Elaine,
"Thy child is in my womb."
Thereat the morning's silvern light
Flooded the bridal room.

That light it was a benison;
It seemed a holy boon,
As when behind a wrack of cloud
Shineth the summer moon.

And in the eyes of maid Elaine
Looked forth so sweet a faith,
Sir Launcelot took his glittering sword,
And thrust it in the sheath.

"So God me help, I spare thy life,
But I am wretch and thrall,
If any let my sword to make
Dame Brisen's head to fall."

"So have thy will of her," she said,
"But do to me but good;
For thou hast had my fairest flower,
Which is my maidenhood."

"And we have done the will of God,
And the will of God is best."
Sir Launcelot lifted the maid Elaine
And hid her on his breast.

Anon there cometh in a dove,
By the window's open fold,
And in her mouth was a rich censer
That shone like beaten gold.

And therewithal was such savor,
As bloweth over sea,
From a land of many colored flowers,
And trees of spicery.

And therewithal was meat and drink,
And a damsel passing fair,
Betwixt her hands of silver white
A golden cup did bear.

"O Jesu," said Sir Launcelot,
"What may this marvel mean?"
"That is," she said, "the richest thing
That any man hath seen."

"O Jesu," said Sir Launcelot,
"What may this sight avail?"
"Now wit ye well," said maid Elaine,
"This is the Holy Grail."

And then a nimbus light hung o'er
Her brow so fair and meek;
And turned to orient pearls the tears
That glistered down her cheek.

And a sound of music passing sweet
Went in and out again.
Sir Launcelot made the sign of the cross,
And knelt to maid Elaine.

"Name him whatever name thou wilt,
But be his sword and mail
Thrice tempered 'gainst a wayward world,
That lost the Holy Grail."

Sir Launcelot sadly took his leave
And rode against the morn
And when the time was fully come
Sir Galahad was born.

Also he was from Jesu Christ,
Our Lord, the eighth degree;
Likewise the greatest knight this world
May ever hope to see.

THE DEATH OF SIR LAUNCELOT

Sir Launcelot had fled to France
For the peace of Guinevere,
And many a noble knight was slain,
And Arthur lay on his bier.

Sir Launcelot took ship from France
And sailed across the sea.
He rode seven days through fair England
Till he came to Almesbury.

Then spake Sir Bors to Launcelot:
The old time is at end;
You have no more in England's realm
In east nor west a friend.

You have no friend in all England,
Sith Mordred's war hath been,
And Queen Guinevere became a nun
To heal her soul of sin.

Sir Launcelot answered never a word
But rode to the west countree
Until through the forest he saw a light
That shone from a nunnery.

Sir Launcelot entered the cloister,
And the queen fell down in a swoon.
Oh blessed Jesu, saith the queen,
For thy mother's love, a boon.

Go hence, Sir Launcelot, saith the queen,
And let me win God's grace.
My heavy heart serves me no more
To look upon thy face.

Through you was wrought King Arthur's death,
Through you great war and wrake.
Leave me alone, let me bleed,
Pass by for Jesu's sake.

Then fare you well, saith Launcelot,
Sweet Madam, fare you well.
And sythen you have left the world
No more in the world I dwell.

Then up rose sad Sir Launcelot,
And rode by wold and mere,
Until he came to a hermitage
Where bode Sir Bedivere.

And there he put a habit on,
And there did pray and fast.
And when Sir Bedivere told him all
His heart for sorrow brast.

How that Sir Mordred, traitorous knight,
Betrayed his King and sire;
And how King Arthur wounded, died
Broken in heart's desire.

And so Sir Launcelot penance made,
And worked at servile toil;
And prayed the Bishop of Canterbury
His sins for to assoil.

His shield went clattering on the wall
To a dolorous wail of wind;
His casque was rust, his mantle dust
With spider webs entwined.

His listless horses left alone
Went cropping where they would,
To see the noblest knight of the world
Upon his sorrow brood.

Anon a Vision came in his sleep,
And thrice the Vision saith:
Go thou to Almesbury for thy sin,
Where lieth the queen in death.

Sir Launcelot cometh to Almesbury
And knelt by the dead queen's bier;
Oh, none may know, moaned Launcelot,
What sorrow lieth here.

What love, what honor, what defeat,
What hope of the Holy Grail.
The moon looked through the latticed glass
On the queen's face cold and pale.

Sir Launcelot kissed the cerèd cloth,
And none could stay his woe,
Her hair lay back from the oval brow,
And her nose was clear as snow.

They wrapped her body in cloth of Raines,
They put her in webs of lead.
They coffined her in white marble,
And sang a mass for the dead.

Sir Launcelot and seven knights
Bore torches around the bier.
They scattered myrrh and frankincense
On the corpse of Guinevere.

They put her in earth by King Arthur
To the chant of a doleful tune.
They heaped the earth on Guinevere,
And Launcelot fell in a swoon.

Sir Launcelot went to the hermitage
Some Grace of God to find;
But never he ate, and never he drank
And there he sickened and dwined.

Sir Launcelot lay in a painful bed,
And spake with a dreary steven;
Sir Bishop, I pray you shrive my soul,
And make it clean for heaven.

The Bishop houseled Sir Launcelot,
The Bishop kept watch and ward.
Bury me, saith Sir Launcelot,
In the earth of Joyous Guard.

Three candles burned the whole night through,
Till the red dawn looked in the room.
And the white, white soul of Launcelot
Strove with a black, black doom.

I see the old witch Dame Brisen,
And Elaine so straight and tall—
Nay, saith the Bishop of Canterbury,
The shadows dance on the wall.

I see long hands of dead women,
They clutch for my soul eftsoon;
Nay, saith the Bishop of Canterbury,
'Tis the drifting light of the moon.

I see three angels, saith he,
Before a silver urn.
Nay, saith the Bishop of Canterbury,
The candles do but burn.

I see a cloth of red samite
O'er the holy vessels spread.
Nay, saith the Bishop of Canterbury,
The great dawn groweth red.

I see all the torches of the world
Shine in the room so clear.
Nay, saith the Bishop of Canterbury,
The white dawn draweth near.

Sweet lady, I behold the face
Of thy dear son, our Lord.
Nay, saith the Bishop of Canterbury,
The sun shines on your sword.

Sir Galahad outstretcheth hands
And taketh me ere I fail—
Sir Launcelot's body lay in death
As his soul found the Holy Grail.

They laid his body in the quire
Upon a purple pall.
He was the meekest, gentlest knight
That ever ate in hall.

He was the kingliest, goodliest knight
That ever England roved,
The truest lover of sinful man
That ever woman loved.

"Your name is Achilles Deatheridge?
I pray you all, fair gentlemen,
Pray for his soul and mine.
He lived to lose the heart he loved,
And drink but bitter wine.

He wrought a woe he knew not of,
He failed his fondest quest,
Now sing a psalter, read a prayer,
May all souls find their rest.

Amen.

ACHILLES DEATHERIDGE

How old are you, my boy?"
"I'm sixteen past and I went to the war
From Athens, Illinois."

"Achilles Deatheridge, you have done
A deed of dreadful note."
"It comes of his wearing a battered hat,
And a rusty, wrinkled coat."

"Why, didn't you know how plain he is?
And didn't you ever hear,
He goes through the lines by day or night
Like a sooty cannoneer?"

"You must have been half dead for sleep,
For the dawn was growing bright."
"Well, Captain, I had stood right there
Since six o'clock last night."

"I cocked my gun at the swish of the grass,
And how am I at fault
When a dangerous looking man won't stop
When a sentry hollers halt?"

"I cried out halt and he only smiled,
And waved his hand like that.
Why, any Johnnie could wear the coat,
And any fellow the hat."

"I hollered halt again and he stopped,
And lighted a fresh cigar.
I never noticed his shoulder badge,
And I never noticed a star."

"So you arrested him? Well, Achilles,
When you hear the swish of the grass,
If it's General Grant inspecting the lines
Hereafter let him pass."

SUSIE

Where did you go, pale Susie, after the day
You left the service of the boarding house?
The night before we made carouse,
And danced the time away.

We boys were in the kitchen and were drinking
Small beer—you slapped the hands of us,
Who stroked your arms half amorous—
Where did you go, I'm thinking?

Medical students up at Hahnemann
Hunt women on a Saturday night.
And sing, tell tales, and verse recite,
And rush the forbidden can.

The paltry mistress made you pay for all
The fault of us, and packed you out of doors
When you had scrubbed the floors,
And swept the entrance hall.

I watched you in your faded cloak and hat
With canvas bag walk toward the Grove.

Then something in my fancy hove,
Laughing I caught you at

The doorway of the hotel on the street
Where I had tracked you round from Thirty-first.
You laughed and cried and called me worst
Of devils on two feet.

There I had followed you and seized you when
You did not care what happened, so
You fell into my hands, you know—
'Tis twenty years since then.

I never saw you after that, nor heard
In all this city aught of you.
You vanished like a blot of dew,
Or ashen hued seed bird.

I wonder if you wed a red bull-throat
Who ran a rivet hammer, drove a truck,
Bore many children or worse luck
Went where the drift weeds float. . . .

JOHNNY APPLESEED

When the air of October is sweet and cold as the wine of apples
Hanging ungathered in frosted orchards along the Grand River,
I take the road that winds by the resting fields and wander
From Eastmanville to Nunica down to the Villa Crossing.

I look for old men to talk with, men as old as the orchards,
Men to tell me of ancient days, of those who built and planted,
Lichen gray, branch broken, bent and sighing,
Hobbling for warmth in the sun and for places to sit and smoke.

For there is a legend here, a tale of the croaking old ones
That Johnny Appleseed came here, planted some orchards around here,

When nothing was here but the pine trees, oaks and the beeches,
And nothing was here but the marshes, lake and the river.

Peter Van Zylen is ninety and this he tells me:
My father talked with Johnny Appleseed there on the hillside,
There by the road on the way to Fruitport, saw him
Clearing pines and oaks for a place for an apple orchard.

Peter Van Zylen says: He got that name from the people
For carrying apple-seed with him and planting orchards
All the way from Ohio, through Indiana across here,
Planting orchards, they say, as far as Illinois.

Johnny Appleseed said, so my father told me:
I go to a place forgotten, the orchards will thrive and be here
For children to come, who will gather and eat hereafter.
And few will know who planted, and none will understand.

I laugh, said Johnny Appleseed: Some fellow buys this timber
Five years, perhaps from to-day, begins to clear for barley.
And here in the midst of the timber is hidden an apple orchard.
How did it come here? Lord! Who was it here before me?

Yes, I was here before him, to make these places of worship,
Labor and laughter and gain in the late October.
Why did I do it, eh? Some folks say I am crazy.
Where do my labors end? Far west, God only knows!

Said Johnny Appleseed there on the hillside: Listen!
Beware the deceit of nurseries, sellers of seeds of the apple.
Think! You labor for years in trees not worth the raising.
You planted what you knew not, bitter or sour for sweet.

No luck more bitter than poor seed, but one as bitter:
The planting of perfect seed in soil that feeds and fails,
Nourishes for a little, and then goes spent forever.
Look to your seed, he said, and remember the soil.

And after that is the fight: the foe curled up at the root,
The scale that crumples and deadens, the moth in the blossoms,

Becoming a life that coils at the core of a thing of beauty:
You bite your apple, a worm is crushed on your tongue!

And it's every bit the truth, said Peter Van Zylen.
So many things love an apple as well as ourselves.
A man must fight for the thing he loves, to possess it:
Apples, freedom, heaven, said Peter Van Zylen.

MOURNIN' FOR RELIGION

Brothers and sisters, I'm mournin' for religion,
But I can't get religion, it's my woman interferin'.
I sing and I pray, and I'm real perseverin',
But I can't get religion,
That's all I have to say.
I know there is a fountain, a Jesus, a comforter,
A heaven, a Jerusalem, a day of Pentecost,
Salvation for the wishin', blood for sin's remission,
A covenant, a promise for souls that are lost.
But I can't get religion, the salvation feelin',
The vision of the Lamb, forgiveness and healin'.
I have a sort of numbness
When I see the mourners kneelin'.
I have a kind of dumbness
When the preacher is appealin'.
I have a kind of wariness, even contrariness,
Even while I'm fearin'
The bottomless pit and the shut gates of heaven,
It's my woman interferin'—

For you see when they say:
Come to the mercy seat, come, come,
The spirit and the bride
Say come, come,
I think of my woman who bore so many children;
I think of her a cookin' for harvesters in summer;
I think of her a lyin' there, a dyin' there, the neighbors
Who came in to fan her and how she never murmured;
And then I seem to grow number and number,
And something in me says:

Why didn't Jesus help her for to die,
Why did Jesus always pass her by,
Let her break her health down as I was growing poorer,
Let her lie and suffer with no medicine to cure her,
I wouldn't treat a stray dog as Jesus acted to her.
If these are devil words, I'm a child of the devil.
And this is why I'm dumb.
As the spirit and the bride say come!

I am old and crippled—sixty in December.
And I wonder if it's God that stretches out and hands us
Troubles we remember?
I'm alone besides, I need the Comforter,
All the children's grown up, livin' out in Kansas.
My old friend Billy died of lung fever. . . .
But the worse of it is I'm really a believer,
Expect to go to hell if I don't get religion.
And I need this religion to stop this awful grievin'
About my woman lyin' there in the cemetery.
And you can't stop this grievin' simply by believin'.
So I mourn for religion,
I mourn for religion,
My old heart breaks for religion!

THE MOURNER'S BENCH

They're holding a revival at New Hope Meetinghouse,
I can't keep from going, I ought to stay away.
For I come home and toss in bed till day,
For thinking of my sin, and the trouble I am in.
I dream I hear the dancers
In the steps and swings,
The quadrilles and the lancers
They danced at Revis Springs.
I lie and think of Charley, Charley, Charley,
The Bobtown dandy
Who had his way with me.
And no one is so handy
A dancer as Charley

To Little Drops of Brandy,
Or the Wind that Shakes the Barley,
Or Goo dmornin' Uncle Johnny I've Fetched Your Wagon Home.

And Greenberry Atterberry, who toed it like a pigeon
Has gone and got religion;
He's deserted the dancers, the fiddlers, merry-makers,
And I should do it too.
For Charley, Charley has left me for to roam.
But a woman at the mourner's bench must tell her story true—
What shall I do? What shall I do?

My grandmother told me of Old Peter Cartwright
Who preached hell-fire
And the worm that never dies.
And here's a young preacher at the New Hope Meetinghouse,
And every one allows, he has old Peter's brows,
And flaming of the eyes,
And the very same way, they say.
Last night he stuck his finger right down in my direction,
And said: "God doesn't care
For your woman's hair.
Jesus wants to know if your soul is fair
As your woman's complexion."
And then I thought he knew—
Oh, what shall I do?

Greenberry Atterberry, weeping and unsteady
Had left his seat already.
He stood at the mourner's bench in great tribulation
And told the congregation:
That fiddling and dancing and tobacco chewin'
Led up to whisky and to woman's ruin—
And I thought he looked at me.
Well, you can stop dancing, and you can stop drinking,
And you can leave the quarter-horses at the crooked races.
But a woman, a woman, the people will be thinking
Forever of a woman who confesses her behavior.
And then I couldn't look in the people's faces,
All weeping and singing, O gentle Saviour!

Then the devil said: You wench,
You'd cut a pretty figure at the mourner's bench.
Go out and look for Charley,
Go out and look for Charley,
He's down at Leese's Grove.
He has found a fresh love,
Go win him back again,
He is dancing on the platform to The Speckled Hen.

O Saviour, Saviour, how can I join the mourners,
Face all the scorners?
But how can I hunt Charley at Leese's Grove?
How can I stand the staring, the whispering of things
Down at Revis Springs?
How can I stand the mocking of the fiddle strings?
Charley! Charley!
So it's knowing what's best to do,
Saviour! Saviour!
It's knowing what's best to do!

STEAM SHOVEL CUT

Steam Shovel Cut lies through a wood,
And the trestle's at the end.
And north are the lonely Fillmore Hills,
And south the river's bend.

It's Christmas day and the blue on the hill
Is flapped by a flying crow.
And the steel of the railroad track is cold,
And the Cut is piled with snow.

What is that there by the trestle's end
Where the Cut slopes down to the slough?
That's Cora Williams lying there
In her cloak of faded blue.

STEAM SHOVEL CUT

Her skirt is red as a northern spy,
And her mittens blackberry black.
And under her cotton underskirt
There's a green place on her back.

Her little gray hat is over her brow,
And covers a purple bruise.
She had white stockings for her feet,
And the holes were in her shoes.

Where did you meet Croak Carless, girl?
And where did you start to booze?
They saw you once at Rigdon's place,
And last at Sandy Hughes'.

On the night that Jesus Christ was born
You were drinking gin and beer.
They saw you sitting on Carless' knees
As the midnight hour drew near.

They saw you two start into the night,
And the night was cold and black.
And then they found you there by the bridge
With the green bruise on your back.

Down through the dark to the Shovel Cut
The two of you walked and sang.
You were holding hands on the trestle bridge
When the bell began to clang.

'Twas back of the curve that the headlight shone,
So what was the use of eyes?
The mad iron thing leaped on you there
As you ran on the trestle ties.

It rushed on you like a furious bull
That charges a scarlet flag.
The engineer looked long at the gauge,
As the fireman scraped the slag.

Croak Carless jumped and fell on a stone,
And the world to him was a blank.
But the iron thing struck at your back
And doubled you down on the bank.

Croak Carless woke from a sleep like death,
And found you covered with blood.
He slinks to the river to wash his hands,
He runs to hide in the wood.

He steals through thickets, hides in a barn,
He cowers where the corn's in shock.
But the posse catches Croak by noon,
And the jailer turns the lock.

Croak Carless' wife weeps at the bars,
Croak weeps in a grated cell.
They've mortgaged the farm for a lawyer's fee
To save Croak's soul from hell.

For the Coroner has a bat-like thing
In a bottle safe in his room.
It looks like a baby devil fish—
It's Cora Williams' womb.

A woman's womb is a thing of doom
And winged with a fan-like mesh.
And who was the father, they're asking Croak,
Of this bit of jelly flesh?

And the doctors took an oath in the court
That a sharp club did the deed.
And the judge was a foe of the lawyer man
Croak Carless paid to plead.

And Croak had talked too much in jail,
And he trembled and testified
To a woeful tangle of time and place,
And the jury thought he lied.

STEAM SHOVEL CUT

Croak Carless' wife sobbed out in court
As they twisted him out and in.
For they made him swear he drank with the girl,
And swear to his carnal sin.

They stood him up on the gallow's trap,
And his voice was clear and low:
If I killed Cora Williams, men,
My soul to hell should go.

They sprang the trap, Croak Carless shot
Like a wheat bag toward the floor.
And the doctors let his body hang
Till his old heart beat no more.

They let him alone to work and sweat
For a wife and children's ease.
But they hung him up for a little beer
With a woman on his knees.

And he might have died in bed in a year,
For when they opened him up
They found his heart was a played out pump,
And leaked like a rusty cup.

And a man can live as the church decrees,
Or dance in the way of vice,
A woman's womb is a thing of doom,
And life is the current price.

'Tis a vampire bat, or the leather box
From which you rattle the dice.
'Tis an altar of doom, is a woman's womb,
And man is the sacrifice.

CHRISTMAS AT INDIAN POINT

Who is that calling through the night,
A wail that dies when the wind roars?
We heard it first on Shipley's Hill,
It faded out at Comingoer's.

Along five miles of wintry road
A horseman galloped with a cry,
"'Twas two o'clock," said Herman Pointer,
"When I heard clattering hoofs go by."

"I flung the winder up to listen;
I heerd him there on Gordon's Ridge;
I heerd the loose boards bump and rattle
When he went over Houghton's Bridge."

Said Roger Ragsdale: "I was doctorin'
A heifer in the barn, and then
My boy says: 'Pap, that's Billy Paris.'
'There,' says my boy, it is again."

"Says I: 'That kain't be Billy Paris,
We seed 'im at the Christmas tree.
It's two o'clock,' says I, and Billy
I see go home with Emily.'

"'He is too old for galavantin'
Upon a night like this,' says I.
'Well, pap,' says he, 'I know that frosty,
Good-natured huskiness in that cry.'

"'It kain't be Billy,' says I, swabbin'
The heifer's tongue and mouth with brine,
'I never thought—it makes me shiver,
And goose-flesh up and down the spine.'"

Said Doggie Traylor: "When I heard it
I 'lowed 'twas Pin Hook's rowdy new 'uns.
Them Cashner boys was at the schoolhouse
Drinkin' there at the Christmas doin's."

Said Pete McCue: "I lit a candle
And held it up to the winder pane.
But when I heerd again the holler
'Twere half-way down the Bowman Lane."

Said Andy Ensley: "First I knowed
I thought he'd thump the door away.
I hopped from bed, and says, 'Who is it?'
'O, Emily,' I heard him say.

"And there stood Billy Paris tremblin',
His face so white, he looked so queer.
'O Andy'—and his voice went broken.
'Come in,' says I, 'and have a cheer.'

"'Sit by the fire,' I kicked the logs up,
'What brings you here?—I would be told.'
Says he. 'My hand just . . . happened near hers,
It teched her hand . . . and it war cold.

"'We got back from the Christmas doin's
And went to bed, and she was sayin',
(The clock struck ten) if it keeps snowin'
To-morrow there'll be splendid sleighin'.'

"'My hand teched hers, the clock struck two,
And then I thought I heerd her moan.
It war the wind, I guess, for Emily
War lyin' dead . . . She's thar alone.'

"I left him then to call my woman
To tell her that her mother died.
When we come back his voice was steady,
The big tears in his eyes was dried.

"He just sot there and quiet like
Talked 'bout the fishin' times they had,
And said for her to die on Christmas
Was somethin' 'bout it made him glad.

"He grew so cam he almost skeered us.
Says he: 'It's a fine Christmas over there.'
Says he: 'She was the lovingest woman
That ever walked this Vale of Care.'

"Says he: 'She allus laughed and sang,
I never heerd her once complain.'
Says he: 'It's not so bad a Christmas
When she can go and have no pain.'

"Says he: 'The Christmas's good for her.'
Says he: . . . 'Not very good for me.'
He hid his face then in his muffler
And sobbed and sobbed, 'O Emily.'"

WIDOW LA RUE

I

What will happen, Widow La Rue?
For last night at three o'clock
You woke and saw by your window again
Amid the shadowy locust grove
The phantom of the old soldier:
A shadow of blue, like mercury light—
What will happen, Widow La Rue?

What may not happen
In this place of summer loneliness?
For neither the sunlight of July,
Nor the blue of the lake,
Nor the green boundaries of cool woodlands,
Nor the song of larks and thrushes,
Nor the bravuras of bobolinks,
Nor scents of hay new mown,
Nor the ox-blood sumach cones,
Nor the snow of nodding yarrow,
Nor clover blossoms on the dizzy crest
Of the bluff by the lake,
Can take away the loneliness
Of this July by the lake!

WIDOW LA RUE

Last night you saw the old soldier
By your window, Widow La Rue!
Or was it your husband you saw,
As he lay by the gate so long ago?
With the iris of his eyes so black,
And the white of his eyes so china-blue,
And specks of blood on his face,
Like a wall specked by a shake of a brush;
And something like blubber or pinkish wax,
Hiding the gash in his throat,—
The serum and blood blown up by the breath
From emptied lungs.

II

So Widow La Rue has gone to a friend
For the afternoon and the night,
Where the phantom will not come,
Where the phantom may be forgotten.
And scarcely has she turned the road,
Round the water-mill by the creek,
When the telephone rings and daughter Flora
Springs up from a drowsy chair,
And the ennui of a book,
And runs to answer the call.
And her heart gives a bound,
And her heart stops still,
As she hears the voice, and a faintness courses
Quick as poison through all her frame.
And something like bees swarming in her breast
Comes to her throat in a surge of fear,
Rapture, passion, for what is the voice
But the voice of her lover?
And just because she is here alone
In this desolate summer-house by the lake;
And just because this man is forbidden
To cross her way, for a taint in his blood
Of drink, from a father who died of drink;
And just because he is in her thought
By night and day,
The voice of him heats her through like fire.

She sways from dizziness,
The telephone falls from her shaking hand. . . .
He is in the village, is walking out,
He will be at the door in an hour.

III

The sun is half a hand above the lake
In a sky of lemon-dust down to the purple vastness.
On the dizzy crest of the bluff the balls of clover
Bow in the warm wind blowing across a meadow
Where haycocks stand new-piled by the harvesters
Clear to the forest of pine and beech at the meadow's end.
A robin on the tip of a poplar's spire
Sings to the sinking sun and the evening planet.
Over the olive green of the darkening forest
A thin moon slits the sky, and down the road
Two lovers walk.

It is night when they reappear
From the forest, walking the hayfield over.
And the sky is so full of stars it seems
Like a field of buckwheat. And the lovers look up,
Then stand entranced under the silence of stars,
And in the silence of the scented hayfield,
Blurred only by a lisp of the listless water
A hundred feet below.
And at last they sit by a cock of hay,
As warm as the nest of a bird,
Hand clasped in hand and silent,
Large-eyed and silent.

O, daughter Flora!
Delicious weakness is on you now,
With your lover's face above you.
You can scarcely lift your hand,
Or turn your head
Pillowed upon the fragrant hay.
You dare not open your moistened eyes
For fear of this sky of stars,
For fear of your lover's eyes.
The trance of nature has taken you

Rocked on creation's tide.
And the kinship you feel for this man,
Confessed this night—so often confessed
And wondered at—
Has coiled its final scorcery about you.
You do not know what it is,
Nor care what it is,
Nor care what fate is to come,—
The night has you.
You only move white, fainting hands
Against his strength, then let them fall.
Your lips are parted over set teeth;
A dewy moisture with the aroma of a woman's body
Maddens your lover,
And in a swift and terrible moment
The mystery of love is unveiled to you. . . .

Then your lover sits up with a sigh.
But you lie there so still with closed eyes.
So content, scarcely breathing under that ocean of stars.
A night bird calls, and a vagrant zephyr
Stirs your uncoiled hair on your bare bosom,
But you do not move.
And the sun comes up at last
Finding you asleep in his arms,
There by the haycock.
And he kisses your tears away,
And redeems his word of last night,
For down to the village you go
And take your vows before the Pastor there,
And then return to the summer house. . . .
All is well.

IV

Widow La Rue has returned
And is rocking on the porch—
What is about to happen?
For last night the phantom of the old soldier
Appeared to her again—
It followed her to the house of her friend,
And appeared again.

But more than ever was it her husband,
With the iris of his eyes so black,
And the white of his eyes so china-blue.
And while she thinks of it,
And wonders what is about to happen,
She hears laughter,
And looking up, beholds her daughter
And the forbidden lover.

And then the daughter and her husband
Come to the porch and the daughter says:
"We have just been married in the village, mother;
Will you forgive us?
This is your son; you must kiss your son."
And Widow La Rue from her chair arises
And calmly takes her child in her arms,
And clasps his hand.
And after gazing upon him
Imperturbably, as Clytemnestra looked
Upon returning Agamemnon,
With a light in her eyes which neither fathomed,
She kissed him,
And in a calm voice blessed them.
Then sent her daughter, singing,
On an errand back to the village
To market for dinner, saying:
"We'll talk over plans, my dear."

v

And the young husband
Rocks on the porch without a thought
Of the lightning about to strike.
And like Clytemnestra, Widow La Rue
Enters the house.
And while he is rocking, with all his spirit in a rythmic rapture,
The Widow La Rue takes a seat in the room
By a window back of the chair where he rocks,
And drawing the shade
She speaks:

"These two nights past I have seen the phantom of the old soldier
Who haunts the midnights
Of this summer loneliness.
And I knew that a doom was at hand. . . .
You have married my daughter, and this is the doom. . . .
O, God in heaven!"
Then a horror as of a writhing whiteness
Winds out of the July glare
And stops the flow of his blood,
As he hears from the re-echoing room
The voice of Widow La Rue
Moving darkly between banks
Of delirious fear and woe!

"Be calm till you hear me through. . . .
Do not move, or enter here,
I am hiding my face from you. . . .
Hear me through, and then fly.
I warned her against you, but how could I tell her
Why you were not for her?
But tell me now, have you come together?
No? Thank God for that. . . .
For you must not come together. . . .
Now listen while I whisper to you:
My daughter was born of a lawless love
For a man I loved before I married,
And when, for five years, no child came
I went to this man
And begged him to give me a child. . . .
Well then . . . the child was born, your wife as it seems. . . .
And when my husband saw her,
And saw the likeness of this man in her face
He went out of the house, where they found him later
By the entrance gate
With the iris of his eyes so black,
And the white of his eyes so china-blue,
And specks of blood on his face,
Like a wall specked by a shake of a brush.
And something like blubber or pinkish wax

Hiding the gash in his throat—
The serum and blood blown up by the breath
From emptied lungs. Yes, there by the gate, O God!
Quit rocking your chair! Don't you understand?
Quit rocking your chair! Go! Go!
Leap from the bluff to the rocks on the shore!
Take down the sickle and end yourself!
You don't care, you say, for all I've told you?
Well, then, you see, you're older than Flora. . . .
And her father died when she was a baby. . . .
And you were four when your father died. . . .
And her father died on the very day
That your father died,
At the very same moment. . . .
On the very same bed. . . .
Don't you understand?"

VI

He ceases to rock. He reels from the porch,
He runs and stumbles to reach the road.
He yells and curses and tears his hair.
He staggers and falls and rises and runs.
And Widow La Rue
With the eyes of Clytemnestra
Stands at the window and watches him,
Running and tearing his hair.

VII

She seems so calm when the daughter returns.
She only says: "He has gone to the meadow,
He will soon be back. . . ."
But he never came back.

And the years went on till the daughter's hair
Was white as her mother's there in the grave.
She was known as the bride whom the bridegroom left,
And didn't say good-by.

THE NEW APOCRYPHA

AT DECAPOLIS

(St. Mark, Chap. V)

I

THE ACCUSATION

I am a farmer and live
Two miles from Decapolis.
Where is the magistrate? Tell me
Where the magistrate is!

Here I had made provision
For children and wife,
And now I have lost my all;
I am ruined for life.

I, a believer, too,
In the synagogues.—
What is the faith to me?
I have lost my hogs.

Two thousand hogs as fine
As ever you saw,
Drowned and choked in the sea—
I want the law!

They were feeding upon a hill
When a strolling teacher
Came by and scared my hogs—
They say he's a preacher,

And cures the possessed who haunt
The tombs and bogs.
All right; but why send devils
Into my hogs?

They squealed and grunted and ran
And plunged in the sea.
And the lunatic laughed who was healed,
Of the devils free.

Devils or fright, no matter
A fig or straw.
Where is the magistrate, tell me—
I want the law!

II

JESUS BEFORE MAGISTRATE AHAZ

Ahaz, there in the seat of judgment, hear,
If you have wit to understand my plea.
Swine-devils are too much for swine, that's clear,
Poor man possessed of such is partly free,

Is neither drowned, destroyed at once, his chains
May pluck while running, howling through the mire
And take a little gladness for his pains,
Some fury for unsatisfied desire.

But hogs go mad at once. All this I knew,—
But then this lunatic had rights. You grant
Swine-devils had him in their clutch and drew
His baffled spirit. How significant,

As they were legion and so named, the point
Is, life bewildered, torn in greed and wrath;
Desire puts a spirit out of joint.
Swine-devils are for swine, who have no path.

But man with many lusts, what is his way,
Save in confusion, through accustomed rooms?
He prays for night to come, and for the day
Amid the miry places and the tombs.

But hogs run to the sea. And there's an end.
  Would I might cast the swinish demons out
From man forever. Yet, the world attend:
  The lesson of the thing what soul can doubt?

What is the loss of hogs, if man be saved?
  What loss of lands and houses, man being free?
Clothed in his reason, sits the man who raved,
  Clean and at peace, your honor. Come and see.

Your honor shakes a frowning head. Not loth,
  Speaking more plainly, deeper truth to draw;
Do your judicial duty, yet I clothe
  Free souls with courage to transgress the law

By casting demons out from self, or those
  Like this poor lunatic whom your synagogues
Would leave to battle singly with his woes—
  What is a man's soul to a drove of hogs?

Which being lost, men play the hypocrite
  And make the owner chief in the affair.
You banish me for witchcraft. I submit.
  Work of this kind awaits me everywhere.

Casting the swinish devils out of men
  And into swine where better they belong,
The devils have their place at last, and then
  The man is healed who had them—where's the wrong

Save to the owner? Well, your synagogues
  Make the split hoof and chewing of the cud
The test of lawful flesh. Not so are hogs.
  This rule has been the statute from the flood.

Ahaz, your judgment has a fatal flaw.
  Is it not so with judges first and last—
You break the law to specialize the law?—
  This is the devil that from you I cast.

BUSINESS REVERSES

(St. Mark, Chap. VI)

Everything! Counter and scales—
I'll take whatever you give.
I'm through, and off to Athens,
Where a man like me can live.

And Hipparch, the baker, is going;
My chum, who came with me
To follow the crowds who follow
The prophet of Galilee.

We two were there at Damascus
Dealing in figs and wine.
Nice little business! Some one
Said: "Here, I'll give you a line!

"Buy fish, and set up a booth,
Get a tent and make your bread.
There are thousands who come to listen,
They are hungry and must be fed."

And so we went. Believe me,
There were crowds, and hungry, too.
Five thousand stood in the desert
And listened the whole day through.

Famished? Well, yes. The disciples
Were saying to send them away
To buy their bread in the village,
But the prophet went on to say:

"Feed them yourselves, O you
Of little faith." But they said:
"We have just two little fishes
And five little loaves of bread."

We heard it, me and Hipparch,
And rubbed our hands. You see

BUSINESS REVERSES

We were there to make some money
  In the land of Galilee.

We had stock in plenty. We waited.
  I wiped the scales, and my chum
Re-stacked the loaves. We bellowed,
  But no one seemed to come.

"Fresh fish!" I bawled my lungs out:
  "Nice bread!" poor Hipparch cried,
But what did they do? Sat down there
  In fifties, side by side,

In ranks, the whole five thousand.
  Then—well, the prophet spoke,
And broke the two little fishes,
  And the five little loaves he broke,

And fed the whole five thousand.
  Why, yes! So gorged they slept.
And we stood beaten and bankrupt.
  Poor Hipparch swore and wept.

They gathered up twelve baskets
  Full from the loaves of bread;
  Two fishes made twelve baskets
  Of fragments after they fed.

And we—what was there to do
  But dump our stock on the sand?
That's what we got for our labor
  And thrift, in such a land.

We met a man near Damascus
  Who had joined the mystagogues.
He said: "I was wicked as you men
  Until I lost my hogs."

Now Hipparch and I are going
  To Athens, beautiful, free.
No more adventures for us two
  In the land of Galilee.

TRIBUTE MONEY

(*St. Matthew, Chap. XXII:24-27*)

This is all of the story:
Capernaum stood in the way,
The takers of tribute came:
"Does your master tribute pay?"

And Peter ran to Jesus,
And Jesus answered him: "Nay!
Do the kings of the earth have tribute
From their own children, pray?

"Or do they get it of strangers?"
And Peter answered him: "Yea."
Then Jesus said: "This is Galilee,
Should Galileans pay?

"But yet, lest we offend them,
There's a fish out there in the bay,
With a silver coin in his mouth—
Go catch the fish and pay."

Did Jesus mean to mock
The tariff laws of the day:
That Peter could catch the fish
As likely as he would pay?

Did he mean to resist or yield
If Peter was lucky that day?
I, Matthew, tell you no more,
And Mark and Luke don't say.

Did we enter the gate, or sit
Where the rocks and olives are gray?
Right then there was better matter
For a follower to portray.

The multitude gathered. He called
A child to him from its play,
And set the child in our midst;
And then he began to say:—

"This is the kingdom of heaven."
And he took its hand and smiled.
"The kingdom of heaven," he said,
"Is like the heart of a child."

And I say, if this be true,
The Kingdom is surely defiled
By laws, and tariffs and kings
Unknown to the heart of a child.

FIRST ENTRANTS

(*St. Matthew, Chap. XXII:31*)

We know the game of lawyer and priest;
We know the cunning of Pharisee, Scribe;
We know the malice of soldier, jailer;—
Hearts of those who abstain, imbibe.

And when we saw a God-mad fool
Like John the Baptist who cursed and grieved
For the hate of the elders, the harlot's sorrow,
We listened to him and we believed.

We know we are wronged, he voiced it for us;
We know we are mocked, he gave us place
With the children of grief, the simple hearted,
The broken spirits deserving grace.

He knew men use us and throw us away.
He knew we give and the gift is loathed.
We are the givers to men who scourge us,
Drive us to darkness, cold, unclothed.

And when he said: "Behold he is there
Whose latchet I am unworthy to loose,"
Jesus took us, the humble hearted,
The broken vessels that none will use.

And we believed again, and saw
A youth who loved us without desire;
Feasting, drinking with us the harlots,
Outcasts, sinners, wrecks of the fire.

These were our brothers: John the Baptist,
Jesus of Nazareth. Brothers I say.
Brothers and sisters bound in the service
Of giving comfort and pity away.

Pity and solace and hope of heaven,
Healing and tenderness came of Christ.
And we, the harlots, have given pity,
And given delight to men who enticed

This little gift, so easy to give;
This wonder gift to them, as they said.
That is the passion that moves a woman
Before it becomes a matter of bread.

Before the lashes of scorn and the chains,
The dungeons, before the scowls and sneers;
Before the wrath of the priest, the temple's
Bolted door for our hunger, tears.

Before the delight we sell is stale
As the steps of a dancer, growing old.
All is delight, kisses and dancing—
Men can buy, for they have the gold.

And we, he says, shall enter heaven
Before the priests and the elders do.
Why do we enter? Because as sorrow,
Poverty, humbleness, we are true.

Without pretense or pride. We are children
Who have shirked the task, but repent the sin.
But they, the elders and priests, have promised
To work for heaven and never begin.

Why do we enter, save spite of our craft
To wheedle with lies we all stand forth
Known to the world as painted harlots,
Taken by no one over our worth?

And it's good to enter, if we can be
With Jesus and John, and given reprieve
From priests and elders who run the city,
And hound the harlots who see and believe.

THE SINGLE STANDARD

(*St. John, Chap. VIII*)

It was known through Judea, we knew it:—
That Joseph beguiled
By mercy for Mary espoused,
And already with child,

Before they had come to each other,
Would put her away
In secret, before the Sanhedrin
Could summon, array,

The witnesses, judge her and make her
A noise and a shame—
We knew this, and what would he do
If the case were the same

As his father believed was the case
With his mother? would he,
A prophet, fulfill all the law,
Or let her go free?—

This Sarah, you know, that I caught,
Was a witness and saw.
Now what would he do, shade away,
Or judge by the law?

For Moses decreed if a woman
Who is married shall lie
With a man, whether wedded or not,
The woman shall die

With the man in a volley of stones;
And Moses decreed
If a virgin already betrothed
Shall lust in the deed

With a man not the bridegroom, and whether
The man shall be wed,
The people shall stone them with stones
Until they be dead.

Now mark you, how equal the law
Of weight and of span:
One law for the woman in sin,
The same for the man.

If Moses be still the law-giver,
By nothing dethroned,
And this be the law, then this Sarah
Was fit to be stoned.

And if it be true, as he says,
That he came to fulfill
The law, nor destroy it, why then
We thought he would will

The death of this woman we took
In adultery, yes in the act,
So we argued together beforehand
The law and the fact.

Now the case was this way: this Josiah
Late journeyed from Tyre,
Three wives to his household already,
Yet alive with desire,

And free by our custom and law
To add to his hearth
A fourth for the heirs to his house,
And for comfort and mirth,

Came back in the cause of a field
He had bought; as it chanced
Met up with this Sarah, a wife,
They feasted and danced,

Her spouse being absent, what's more
In Egypt for good.
So Josiah and Sarah were found
In the act in the wood.

We brought her before him, accused,
And told him the case.
He stooped, as it seemed, to conceal
A blush on his face,

And wrote in the sand, as we stood
And pressed him he wrote:
"Anise" and "cummin" and "gnat"
And "Moses" and "mote."

We cried all the more, he uplifted
Himself, said: "Begin
Your throwing of stones, let the first
Be him without sin."

So there I was caught, for he knew—
Like wheat from the scythe
We shrank—I was guilty of sin,
I had failed in my tithe

Of anise. But why have clean hands
To work at our smudges?
And how will you ever stop sin
If you ask of the judges

To be without sin ere they punish
A matter of lust?
I call this a ruling where morals
Fall down in the dust.

The most of us left then. He asked her:
"Does no man condemn?
Nor do I." And so he made one
With me and with them.

So here in a sense was the world
Spiritual, civil,
Prophet and Pharisee, judge
Leagued up with the devil.

For what did it matter to say
To go and no more
Sin as she had, if the sin
Would fare as before?

It followed that Sarah went free,
And Josiah the man.
One standard for both is the rule,
And the modern plan.

What's that? Why to sin if you wish—
For what is a sin
If no stones are hurled for the lack
Of a man to begin?

And so it all ended. This Sarah
Was given a bill.
She married Josiah, they say,
And lives with him still.

THE GREAT MERGER

(*Exodus, Chap XX*)

Philo, the worst has come,
All we foresaw and feared:
Delphos will soon be dumb,
Eleusis felled and cleared.

Not only Marduk and Bel
Shamash, Nana, and Sin
Are doomed to be swallowed. Rebel?
It is too late to begin.

They have worked for this merger for years;
They have bullied, lied and coerced.
They have played with curses and tears.
And now at last is the worst:

For Zeus goes into the bowl
Of Cyclops, thoroughly blended.
The brew is Jehovah, a Soul
Envious, sour, commended

And forced to our lips. His son
And another, the Holy Ghost,
Are mixed with him, there is none
Not stirred in the mixture and lost

Of the gods we loved. They say
There is only one god, not many.
Well, who knows, we of clay,
If there be a thousand, or any?

They say there is one—all right!
They take over all the rest.
And so there is one, we can fight,
Argue, pray and protest;

Set up a booth to Apollo,
Athene; bawl and persuade.
The crowds no longer follow—
Jehovah has got the trade.

For the Jews have used the scheme
Of commerce for making a god:
A harbor where no trireme
But their own can dock or load.

Now who will come to dissolve
This theo-monopoly?
And the power they took devolve
On a mightier deity?

It will come. But as for Zeus,
Osiris, Ptah, Zoroaster,
They are stewed in the dominant juice
Of Jehovah, lord and master.

We accept the fate. We laugh.
The earth, the sea and the sky
Are at last the cenotaph
Of gods, who always die.

THE FIG TREE

(*St. Matthew, Chap. XXI*)

With all of the rest of my troubles my fig tree's withered and gone.
It stood in the road, you know, I haven't much of a lawn.
I step from my door to a step, and from that right into the street.
Just the same I sat under my tree, as a shade from the noonday heat.

Camels came by and asses, caravans, footmen, too;
Soldiers of Cæsar saw me and ate of my tree, nor drew
Ax nor sword to the branches, nor even a hack on the bole.
Now what had I done or my tree? I call it an evil dole

To a tree that must rest as a man rests. Why last year what
a crop!
Figs all over the branches, from lower limb to top.
The tree was resting this year, contenting itself with leaves,
If magic comes of believing, beware the man who believes.

If faith can remove a mountain, then faith, I say, beware.
Some morn I'll look toward Olivet and find it no longer there.
These fellows can blast our vineyards, level our hills or remove.
And what does it prove but faith, what other good does it
prove?

Nothing at all! Just magic, like Egypt's cunning breed.
And to do such things with faith the size of a mustard seed!
What is there need of more? If you gave them faith as a pear
They would set Orion dancing around the paws of the Bear;

Make the heavens fall on our heads, the whole world ruin and
wreck;
Slay us and our children, enslave, put the yoke on our neck;
Smash cities to strengthen the village, have life just as they
would.
And make that evil which is not, make evil into good.

Anyway he came, he was hungry, and it was break of dawn.
He ran to my tree expectant, saw nothing but leaves thereon.
Then raged for the lack of figs, no grace for the years that it
bore.
And he said may no fruit grow hereon forevermore.

With that my tree curled up like a leaf in a windy blaze.
I was standing here on my step half blind in a sudden maze.
Then he said: have faith and do what I have done to this tree,
Or say to the mountains move and be cast into the sea.

So now I have no shade at noon under leafy boughs,
Why, the tree was good for resting, cooler than in the house.
If it never bore again, if the life be more than meat,
Why not this tree for my dreams, though he found no figs to eat.

But I swear it had borne next year, it was only taking a rest.
There's too many saints who are straining the world to a dream in the breast.
Next year no figs for Cæsar, and none for myself, what's worse,
If this be the work of faith, then faith itself is a curse.

JOHN IN PRISON

(*St. Luke, Chap. XVI. St. Matthew, Chap. XI*)

John said to the jailer: "Where are my disciples? Befriend
My grief and my doubt, and entreat them to come, to the end

That they ask him for me if we look for another, or deem,
As I did, that this prophet shall save and fulfill and redeem."

And the jailer replied: "Since the wrath of King Herod a dish
Your head shall contain by to-morrow, I give you your wish."

So he brought the disciples to John and the two of them led
To the cell where he sat, and John to the two of them said:—

"At this end of my life and my hopes, at the door of my doom
Go ask him for me and report: is it he that should come,

Or shall we yet look for another?" Amazed were the two
And one of them spoke to the Baptist and said: "Is it true

That you preached in the wilderness saying repent and prepare
The way of the Lord, whose shoes I am worthless to bear;

Who will fan out the chaff, gather wheat, purge the floor
With fire and the Spirit baptize you, bring down and restore

The kingdom of heaven? And are we abused in the word
That as he came out of the waters of Jordan you heard

A voice call from heaven which thundered: 'This son of my love
With whom I am pleased you shall hear,' and a dove

For the Spirit descended upon him—and yet can you ask
If he be the one that should come? Yet we take up the task

And go at your bidding." And John said: "I suffer without
You seek him and ask, for this is the cause of my doubt:—

I have heard of his works and rejoice. But why does he feast
When I fasted myself? And how have the rumors increased

That he fellows with publicans, sinners and drinkers of wine,
A bibber himself, when the springs of the desert were mine?

And how is the ax, as I said, laid close to the root of the tree,
And my curses fulfilled of the Pharisees, if this must be?

And if, as they say, he is preaching the word that we make
Of the unrighteous mammon a friend for the day when we break

With the lords of the riches of truth, as he put it, for then
The unrighteous mammon shall take us, console us again:—

I have wasted the goods of my lord! I am caught and accused!
Shall I make good the theft from my lord in a trust I abused?

Why, no! I go out to the debtors, my master to foil,
How much do you owe him? Why, so many measures of oil!

Sit down then, I say, make the bill but a half, quickly write:—
I am wiser in this, so he says, than the children of light—

As I make for myself by the trick of a thief, and a theft,
The confederates' home for my own for my honor bereft.

Go! learn if he said this. Return ere the rise of the sun:—
Shall we look for another to save us, or is he the one?"

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

Who is that coming? Look! They are bearing a body again.
It's a woman now, I think. And the very same young men

Who brought Ananias' body we buried a moment ago.
Pat down the earth a little, the grass will sooner grow.

Yes, now I see it's Sapphira. What did she do to win
Death at the hands of Peter, or was it her husband's sin?

To which she agreed, or kept her husband's secret in faith.
They sold a sheep, as I hear it, and suffered sudden death

For hiding part of the price, for a thing commendable:
Their boy is sick, and they needed money to get him well.

Just look how things are going: Cæsar the despot rules,
The state is his. For the rest, we are run by a pack of fools;

Zealots and mystics who say that the end of the world is near.
Tyranny around us, on top, under us dullness and fear.

Songs and the wine-cup banished, freedom throttled blue.
It's the same here being a Greek, Persian, Median, Jew.

Roman sovereignty over us, merciless, cold and bright.
Fogs over the land of dust, day no different than night.

Listless we labor or idle, creep into an early bed.
Sleep is the best thing now, and the best is the sleep of the dead.

Prepare for the end of the world! Build up the church, the throne,
Sell all your goods and give, have nothing to call your own;

Put everything in common. That's one cry. What remains?
Taxes, soldiers, prisons, edicts, laws and chains.

There never was such a time! What man is lord of his soul?
Someone entered my barn and took my ass with foal

For the prophet to ride on in triumph. I was there and saw him ride,
Crowds crying hallelujah pressing on every side.

They would have all things in common. They kill a man and his wife,
And Cæsar rules as always, and yet they call this life!

Wars forever and ever, manned by hovels and huts;
And what is it all about? lands, and gold and guts;

And baptists stiring the dreamers, and bankers that thrive thereby.
Why kill off Ananias when the whole of life is a lie?

All right, young men, put her down. Go to it now with the spade.
We'll bury the woman Sapphira here where her husband's laid.

They're out of it. Neither Cæsar nor Peter can wake their sleep.
I lost my ass, and they lost their lives for the price of a sheep.

And Cæsar will rule forever! And Peter if he grows strong
Will make a pact with Cæsar, and Israel's woe and wrong

Will spread all over the earth. It takes no prophet to see
That while there is Gold and Fear man will never be free—

Until the world is fed, and hunger steals like a wraith
With the ghost of Cæsar's lust, and the mist of Peter's faith.

THE WEDDING FEAST

(*St. John, Chap. II*)

Said the chief of the marriage feast to the groom,
Whence is this blood of the vine?
Men serve at first the best, he said,
And at the last, poor wine.

Said the chief of the marriage feast to the groom,
When the guests have drunk their fill
They drink whatever wine you serve,
Nor know the good from the ill.

How have you kept the good till now
When our hearts nor care nor see?
Said the chief of the marriage feast to the groom,
Whence may this good wine be?

Said the chief of the marriage feast, this wine
Is the best of all by far.
Said the groom, there stand six jars without
And the wine fills up each jar.

Said the chief of the marriage feast, we lacked
Wine for the wedding feast.
How comes it now one jar of wine
To six jars is increased?

Who makes our cup to overflow?
And who has the wedding blest?
Said the groom to the chief of the feast, a stranger
Is here as a wedding guest.

Said the groom to the chief of the wedding feast,
Moses by power divine
Smote water at Meribah from the rock,
But this man makes us wine.

THE WEDDING FEAST

Said the groom to the chief of the wedding feast,
  Elisha by power divine
Made oil for the widow to sell for bread,
  But this man, wedding wine.

He changed the use of the jars, he said,
  From an outward rite and sign:
Where water stood for the washing of feet,
  For heart's delight there's wine.

So then 'tis he, said the chief of the feast,
  Who the wedding feast has blest?
Said the groom to the chief of the feast, the stranger
  Is the merriest wedding guest.

He laughs and jests with the wedding guests,
  He drinks with the happy bride.
Said the chief of the wedding feast to the groom,
  Go bring him to my side.

Jesus of Nazareth came up,
  And his body was fair and slim.
Jesus of Nazareth came up,
  And his mother came with him.

Jesus of Nazareth stands with the dancers
  And his mother by him stands.
The bride kneels down to Jesus of Nazareth
  And kisses his rosy hands.

The bridegroom kneels to Jesus of Nazareth
  And Jesus blesses the twain.
I go a way, said Jesus of Nazareth,
  Of darkness, sorrow and pain.

After the wedding feast is labor,
  Suffering, sickness, death,
And so I make you wine for the wedding,
  Said Jesus of Nazareth.

My heart is with you, said Jesus of Nazareth,
As the grape is one with the vine.
Your bliss is mine, said Jesus of Nazareth,
And so I make you wine.

Youth and love I bless, said Jesus,
Song and the cup that cheers.
The rosy hands of Jesus of Nazareth
Are wet with the young bride's tears.

Love one another, said Jesus of Nazareth,
Ere cometh the evil of years.
The rosy hands of Jesus of Nazareth
Are wet with the bridegroom's tears.

Jesus of Nazareth goes with his mother,
The dancers are dancing again.
There's a woman who pauses without to listen,
'Tis Mary Magdalen.

Forth to the street a Scribe from the wedding
Goes with a Sadducee.
Said the Scribe, this shows how loose a fellow
Can come out of Gallilee!

GABRIEL AND ZACHARIAS

(*St. Luke, Chap. I*)

I

Gabriel stood in the presence of the Lord
Awaiting the command of his excellent word.

"My heart hath compassion," the Lord God saith,
"On the prayers of Zacharias and Elizabeth.

Zacharias is old, and his wife is old.
Their blood is water that runs ice cold.

But go to the temple and tell Zacharias
Of the miracle work I will bring to pass.

Elizabeth's womb is a shelled peascod,
No less she shall bear, I am the Lord God.

The priest Zacharias is a fallen tower.
But I will establish him again with power.

And the priest Zacharias shall plow and sow,
And John the Baptist is the fruit that shall grow."

"It is done," said Gabriel, flashing his sword.
And he preened great wings for to carry the word.

II

Gabriel appeared unto Zacharias
And told him the wonder that would come to pass.

Zacharias served as Abia's priest
Preparing the way for the Candlemas feast.

And the withered body of Zacharias shook
As an evening wind on the breast of a brook.

The urn of incense fell from his hand
When he heard the Lord God's marvelous command.

And Zacharias spake to the angel, saying,
"How may this be after vain years of praying?

How shall I enter to a barren wife,
And myself well stricken in the years of life?

The time of my fruitage and strength is fled."
Then Gabriel was wroth and he shook his head,

And answered Zacharias: "Why bother the Lord
Clinging to his knees if you doubt this word?"

And he touched Zacharias and struck him dumb
For his disbelief in the things to come.

III

All the people waited for Zacharias
Dumb with the wonder that should come to pass.

All the people marveled when he came out,
Stricken speechless for his stiff-necked doubt.

Then he went to Elizabeth, and she conceived,
And his tongue was loosed as his heart believed.

And Elizabeth hid, for joyful was she
Saying, "The Lord God hath looked on me."

IV

Six months passed, and again the Lord
Summoned Gabriel for to carry his word.

"Go to Nazareth in Galilee
Seek out a virgin there named Mary,

Betrothed to Joseph of David's house,
Tell her the vow that the Lord God vows:

She shall conceive and bear a great son,
And the throne of David he shall sit upon."

"Yea," said Gabriel, "Abraham begat
Jacob, as Asa got Josophat;

And Obed came from the womb of Ruth;
And Jesse sired David, the ruddy youth;

And Salathiel was begotten before
Eliakim begat Azor;

Generations fourteen since Adam began,
Eleazar came and begat Matthan,

And Matthan Jacob, who was Joseph's sire,
Husband of Mary in great desire.

This is the lineage of Joseph," said
Angel Gabriel, with a nod of his head.

"And this is the line of King David's house
Wherewith Mary's son shall crown his brows."

"Yea," said the Lord, "But the way of my love
Comes as the wind and the sound thereof;

For the touch of Joseph Mary never shall know
Before a son in her womb shall grow.

I set a serpent of brass on a pole,
Which a snake-bitten man looked on and was whole.

I have stayed the sun, and dried up the seas;
And made axes swim as if they were fleece.

I woke a dead man through Elisha's bones;
I can raise unto Abraham sons from these stones.

I bloomed a blossom on Aaron's rod,
And quickened Elizabeth," saith the Lord God.

"Thou hast done these things," said the angel Gabriel
"But to make men believe is the miracle.

Thou canst favor a virgin, and she will conceive,
But a mightier work is to make men believe.

Joseph is a young man, a scarlet flower,
A beautiful and not a fallen tower.

And Mary already is Joseph's wife,
And the rightful father, if her womb take life.

O Lord God, man is a broken reed,
Give him the faith of a mustard seed,

That the doves of belief may rest in the tree—
This is the miracle that should be,
If Mary conceive in virginity."

And the Lord God said: "Though the world be shammed,
Yet he that believeth not shall be damned.

Haste thee, Gabriel, to Galilee's coast,
Take Mary the love of the Holy Ghost."

V

Gabriel flew down to Mary's cot,
And told her the miracle God had wrought.

"Thy cousin Elizabeth is with child,
As thou shalt be, ere thou art defiled."

And Mary answered him: "How may this be,
Seeing that no man knoweth me?"

"Elizabeth is old, but the old are known
To bear when a husband's seed is sown.

But how shall a virgin strange to the deed
Conceive ere the husband has sown his seed?"

And Gabriel answered: "All things are well.
Nothing with God is impossible.

I took the word to Abia's priest;
And soon thou shalt keep the Candlemas feast.

I struck the doubt of Zacharias dumb;
And Elizabeth's hour is soon to come.

And the word I bring you is faithful and true.
Mary, let faith take hold on you."

And Mary of Galilee, fairest of women
Answered: "Behold the Lord's handmaiden."

"Be it according to thy word,"
Said Mary, handmaiden of the Lord.

VI

Mary went forth to the hill country,
Seeing such marvelous things should be.

She entered the house of Zacharias
To tell of the wonders come to pass.

She ran till her body was out of breath;
She saluted her cousin Elizabeth.

And John the Baptist, resting in the womb
Quivered like a bossom about to bloom.

"Blessed art thou," said Elizabeth,
To Mary of Galilee out of breath.

"And whence is this, and how should it be
That the mother of my Lord cometh to me?

For the babe in my womb at thy salute
Leaped like the silver strings of the lute.

Blessed art thou above all women
Cousin Mary, God's true handmaiden."

And Mary answered: "The Holy One
Hath chosen me for to bear His Son;

Gabriel came with the Lord God's word,
And the soul of me doth magnify the Lord.

And the name of Him is Jesus of Nazareth,
Named by Gabriel, as Gabriel saith.

Keep me a season close to thy side,
'Tis fitting so for the Lord God's bride."

VII

Mary abode three months with Elizabeth,
Then Mary returned to the town of Nazareth.

When the full time of Elizabeth came,
She bore a son and John was his name.

For Zacharias with speech still gone,
Motioned for something to write upon,
And when they brought it he wrote out John.

And his mouth was opened, his tongue made free.
And the wonder was noised in the hill country.

VIII

Cæsar Augustus, ruler of the earth,
Taxed Judea for all it was worth.
And he never heard of the Saviour's birth.

And Joseph took Mary big with child
To Bethlehem to be domiciled
And pay the tax of a carpenter's guild.

John the Baptist insulted Herodias,
And Herod killed the son of Zacharias.

Jesus blasphemed the faith of the Jews,
And they hung him up for his heretic views.

And this is the end of the chronicle,
Of Zacharias and Gabriel.

And out of it all we have the flood
Of fountains filled with His precious blood,

Sung in Spoon River with flowing tears
By the farmer folk and the pioneers.

JUDAS ISCARIOT

(St. John, Chap. XVII)

Jesus, the son, had glory with the Father,
Life and omniscience, before the world was.
Jesus, the son, lived long before his mother,
And knew all things that were coming to pass.
Jesus, the son, and his Father in the darkness
Of the theatre Eternity saw all the Future,
A film of the planets flowering out of starkness,
The Earth and the Garden and the Great Freebooter,
Thrown out of heaven—and this too was shown—
By the Son and the Father for his treason's sake.
Jesus and the Father, on a golden throne
Ordained for glory and for shame the snake.
Knew and predestined from time's beginning
All the world's woe from the angels' fall,
Poverty, plague, and death from the sinning
Of Adam and Eve by the Garden's wall;
Knew and predestined the serpent uplifted
By Moses in the wilderness to cure snake bite;
Knew and predestined the soul of man sifted
By Jesus on the cross for the Father's spite.
Knew and predestined Judas the betrayer,
The needful offense and the woe thereof;
And saw all the world turn robber and slayer
For doubt and doctrine and Jesus' love.
Knew and predestined the propitiation
To satisfy the Father's infinite wrath;
And decreed flesh and blood as the only collation
To strengthen the soul for the narrow path.
So as the world's corruption grew riper,
Rotting where Satan, the angel, was hurled,
A serpent of brass might save from the viper,
But it took real blood to cure a sick world.
Whose blood? Jesus' blood! His and no other
Would please the Father, and slake hell's thirst.
Whose flesh? Jesus' flesh! Not even his mother
Knew the Son's and the Father's plan from the first.

For the Father and Jesus sowed Judas' seed;
And Jesus chose Judas that himself might bleed,
And die for the writing of the Christian creed;
And ordained the kiss and the silver fee—
Some one must kill Jesus, and why not he?

The ark of the covenant was old and spent;
The world grew wickeder after the flood;
The Son and the Father planned a testament,
Not the blood of bullocks, but Jesus' blood.
A sweet smelling savor the Father demanded,
An offering, a sacrifice, a ransom for many;
Or else creation itself was stranded.
Jesus was the hope, or there wasn't any.
Peace should be made through the blood of the cross;
Blood should be shed for the people to drink;
Flesh should be killed for Eden's loss,
And this was salvation, link by link:
Redemption to be alone through blood;
The eternal covenant sealed with blood;
No sin's remission except with blood;
The church of the Father purchased with blood;
No saving drink save the drink of blood;
No finished faith without shedding of blood;
No feast of salvation for any to eat,
Save the veins of Jesus open and bleed;
Then flesh for men that is truly meat,
And drink for men that is drink indeed!
Blood! Blood! Blood! Blood!
Eden was replaced by the Field of Blood,
Which Judas purchased when he brought about
The world's redemption through innocent blood—
And there it was that his bowels gushed out!

Anno Domini thirty-three
China had dragons and poverty.
Rome had tyrants and newspapers,
Slavery, tenements and skyscrapers.
India slept and dreamed in the heat,

Millions of people had nothing to eat.
Egypt, the bondman, scourged of the Lord
Humbly knelt to the Roman sword;
The Mayas were carving ferocities,
Snarling laughters, their gods to please.
Berbers, Tagalogs, Soudanese
Hunted each other on naked knees.
The cannibal isles beat the big snake drum,
And never heard of the Kingdom to come.
The Pueblo moved by a dim heartache
Danced the dance of the rattlesnake
Greece lay sick by the Cyclades,
And grieved for the days of Pericles.
This was the world's great misery
Anno Domini thirty-three,
When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane
To his Father alone, and not for me,
And not for the world in its tragedy!

This was the prayer that Jesus prayed:
Father, the hour at last is come.
Glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son may be
A Son who now may glorify Thee.
Now is the burden upon me laid;
Thou hast made me the medium
Of life eternal and bliss in heaven
For as many to me as Thou hast given.
I pray for them, not the world, for Thine,
Whom Thine own glory and Self made mine,
Before the world was, for these I pray,
And not for the world, as Thou hast willed.
I have lost none of them, and they
Are saved that the Scripture might be fulfilled.
I have lost none of them, none is forgot,
Sanctify them, and for their sake
Sanctify me, and sanctify all
Purged of their sin, in blood begot.
Give them water of life to slake
Their thirst, whom I and Thou didst call—

For none is lost but Iscariot;
None is lost but the son of perdition,
Judas Iscariot the son of perdition,
None is lost but Iscariot!

Satan was standing by and heard
The prayer of Gethsemane word by word.
He hadn't grieved for Judas until
He saw the tenor of Jesus' will.
Then he dashed a tear from his leathern eye,
And began to curse, and began to cry.
"Where would Jesus be," said he,
"Except for Judas's infamy?
And where the Father, the Church, the Faith,
Except for the blood of Jesus' death?
It isn't good and it isn't fair;
It tangles and snarls the ancient plot
Of Eden, to utter such a prayer,
And curse the founder Iscariot,
Without whose treason the Son were not."

Jesus was a shepherd, meek and mild;
Jesus was a lamb, calm as a child;
Jesus was the vine, the way the gate—
But Jesus instructed the world in hate,
Forgetting Judas Iscariot's fate!

THE APOLOGY OF DEMETRIUS

Hyacinthus, your money, the idol you ordered is finished.
May the grace of Diana be with you in strength undiminished.

Behold how the breast of it glitters, as if it were wrought in with stipples.
The Ephesian goddess is nature and these are her bountiful nipples.

So then do I fear for my trade? No, never! It's past my conceiving.
There'll be work for the artist while gods change to win our believing.

Come on then, you babblers and madmen from Jewry and tell us and show us—
Yes, come with your tumult the like of which never was known in Corinth or Troas.

They crowd in the markets and temples and gabble a story that palters.
Well, I whistle and hammer the silver, a maker of statues and altars.

Who says I am wroth lest in Samothrace, Lystra and Delos
The craft of the maker of images fail through the speech of these fellows?

And the temple of Artemis perish? Oh, well, however they hate us
Can they burn it as once it was burned by the wretch Herostratus?

But we built it again and carved it all newly in beauty and wonder—
Destroy it, oh man, who was crazed by lightning and roaring of thunder!

Oh virgin Diana, if virgin, what virgin whose altar is older!
If matron what breasts hang with milk for the eyes of her temples' beholder!

For centuries gone—when these Jews prayed to serpents of bronze and calves that were golden
In Ephesus, Arcady, Athens, our reverent love was beholden

To the goddess of prophecy, music, the lyre, the light, inspiration,
Who guarded and watches the city and lays the foundation

Of nations and laws. What works we have done, yea still we would heed her—
And look at your barbarous ark in your temple of jewels and cedar!

What is our pollution, our idols, our sacrificed things which are strangled?
I ask you already divided in turbulent parties who wrangled

Concerning salvation of God to the faith of the uncircumcision
In Cyprus and Paphos, where poets of love keep the Hellenic vision.

I am filled with my loathing! Oh, keep me a Greek though you make me a whoreson,
When the worship of beauty is dead you may pare off my foreskin.

When the symbol is dead which I mold to Diana our goddess
I'll retire to the country of Nod, no matter where Nod is.

It will live when your temples are built, if any are builded,
And Jesus in silver is nailed on a cross which is gilded.

And touching this thing is it different to worship a man or abstraction?
Or an idol of silver or stone?—go talk to your spirit's distraction!

Areopagus listened to Paul, I am told; for Athens is spending
Her time, as of old, in weighing new things and attending.

They heard him in silence! Let his arguments pass uncorrected—
Why, Plato had told us of Er from the dead resurrected!

Now, mark me! For showing the wisdom, compassion of poets and sages
That silence like lightning will aureole Paul to the end of the ages.

Oh Athens, who set up that shrine, do you think it was just superstition
Which carved for all passers to see that profoundest inscription:

To the unknown God? Do you think it was cowardice even?
Make altars and gods as you will, unknown is the planeted heaven.

And we who are richest in gods—have exhausted all thought in creating
Both symbols and shapes for interpreted loving and hating,

Still sense the Unknown, though in blindness, in love as in duty
Would worship it most—the Unknown is the ultimate beauty.

Yes, Athens who set up the altar and chiseled the worshipful letters
To the Unknown God—what ignorance fastened with fetters

Did you loosen, oh wonder of Tarsus, how help their unknowing
Who told them he dwelt not in temples, nor needed the flowing

Of prayers from men's hearts—the Giver of life and of all things, and seeing
He is lord of the heavens, in whom we are living and having our being.

So quoting our poet who centuries since with the monarch Gonatas
Lived and wrote the Phænomena, known to the Greeks as Aratus.

And yet, Hyacinthus, I pity this Paul for profoundest compassion
Of Jesus before him. This sky and this earth I can fashion

Through mystical wonder or fear to the Sphinx or the Minotaur dreaded.
There's Persephone dying and rising, and Cerberus the dog many-headed.

We have thought it all through! Yet I say if a virtue Elysian
Resides in the doctrine I'll leave off the goddess Ephesian;

Sell my tools, shut my shop, worship God in a way that is safer,
Make the Unknown the known! Have they shown you a magical wafer?

THE HITTITES

(Joshua, Chap. 3-10)

I

Who dug the iron ores from the Black Sea's shores,
And sent a sword of steel to Ramses the great?
Who conquered all the land to where the Taurus stand,
From Troy town to Tigris, with a swift wolf-hate?
Who stretched an empire over Asia Minor's
Realm, as big as Texas, for hundreds of years?
Who built the palace porch through which the royal diners
Passed the stone lions to the carved charioteers?
Who trafficked on the seas to the days of the Ionians,
And wrote each other letters in hieroglyphs?
And bitted the horse before the Babylonians,
And chiseled great eagles on the rocky cliffs,
Which America took over for her big silver dollar,
And the Austrian for her double bird, whose backs oppose?
Who whaled the Jew invader, and led him by a collar,
And bred him to brass and the hawk-bill nose?
In spite of the hope that none should touch a hair of him;
In spite of Jehovah, and Sinai and the ark;
In spite of the promises, the angels, the seraphim,
Who played the sabre-toothed tiger, the shark?
The Hittites did! Classed with the Amorites,
Jebusites, Amalekites—savage men all.
Classed by whom? By Moses and Joshua,
God's own secretaries, inspired ones of Israel,
Writers of prophecy and the law!

2

What had these yellow-skinned, black-eyed conquerors
To do with the Amorites, blue-eyed and fair?
What with the Jebusites, whipped by the Israelites
Flying to the mountain and leaving the wars?
What with the Amalekites, plunderers and parasites,
Darting on the Israelites before they were aware?—
Never a thing! They knew tin and copper,
And how to chisel dadoes, and to build a wall.
And there was trade with Memphis, and there was trade with Joppa,
And Khatti to beautify with temples and palaces,
Khatti the wonderful, the Hittite capital,
With sun-disks, chariots and silver chalices,
Blessed by Cybele, wiser than Jehovah,
Dreaded of Moses, dreaded of Joshua,
God's own secretaries, inspired ones of Israel,
Writers of prophecy and the law!

3

What king worshipped God, the Father of kindness,
Way down in Egypt, before the day of Moses?
Who carved ivory in dragons and roses,
And made bronze bowls in their heathen blindness,
Stiff-necked, rejected and lost of soul,
When the serpent of brass was lifted on a pole?
Who traced the sun as the seasons swang,
And named the planets and counted the hours,
There in Assyria, Asia, America?
Who was Amenhotep and who was Shang?
Who served the gods with songs and flowers?—
They didn't come from Moab, Bashan, Askelon,
Salem, Shiloh, Ephraim, Hebron,
Gilgal, Ziglag, Ziph, nor Jerusalem,
Not a single one of them!

LYRICS AND SONNETS

BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON

By the waters of Babylon by the sea,
On the sand where the waters died,
The sea wind and the tide
Drowned the words you spoke to me.

The sea fell at our feet. The sand
Hushed the whispering waters, near
The babble of boats by the pier
Was the ictus to the roar on the strand.

By the waters of Babylon a grief to be,
The waiting ships in the bay,
Awed the words we would say
Against the sound of the sea:

For France was below the waters, and the west
Behind me where the rains
Come in November on the window panes,
And the blast shakes the ruined nest

Under the dripping eaves. What then remains
But memory of the waters of Babylon,
And the ships like swan after swan,
Under the drone of angry hydroplanes?

By the waters of Babylon we did not weep,
Though love comes and is gone,
As the wind is, as waters drawn
In spray from the deep.

Neither for things foreseen and ominous,
For newer hands that somewhere wait
To thrill afresh, the reblossomed fate
Did we surrender dolorous. . . .

Change now is yours beyond the waters, nights
Of waiting and of doubt have dimmed desire.
Our hands are calm before the dying fire
Of lost delights.

Babylon by the sea knows us no more.
Between the surge's hushes,
When on the sand the water rushes,
There is no voice of ours upon the shore.

INEXORABLE DEITIES

Deities!
Inexorable revealers,
Give me strength to endure
The gifts of the Muses,
Daughters of Memory.
When the sky is blue as Minerva's eyes
Let me stand unshaken;
When the sea sings to the rising sun
Let me be unafraid;
When the meadow lark falls like a meteor
Through the light of afternoon,
An unloosened fountain of rapture,
Keep my heart from spilling
Its vital power;
When at the dawn
The dim souls of crocuses hear the calls
Of waking birds,
Give me to live but master the loveliness.
Keep my eyes unharmed by splendors
Unveiled by you,
And my ears at peace
Filled no less with the music
Of Passion and Pain, growth and change.

But O ye sacred and terrible powers,
Reckless of my mortality,
Strengthen me to behold a face,
To know the spirit of a beloved one,
Yet to endure, yet to dare!

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

THE SIGN

There's not a soul on the square,
And the snow blows up like a sail,
Or dizzily drifts like a drunken man
Falling, before the gale.

And when the wind eddies it rifts
The snow that lies in drifts;
And it skims along the walk and sifts
In stairways, doorways all about
The steps of the church in an angry rout.
And one would think that a hungry hound
Was out in the cold for the sound.

But I do not seem to mind
The snow that makes one blind,
Nor the crying voice of the wind—
I hate to hear the creak of the sign
Of Harmon Whitney, attorney at law;
With its rhythmic monotone of awe.
And neither a moan nor yet a whine,
Nor a cry of pain—one can't define
The sound of a creaking sign.

Especially if the sky be bleak,
And no one stirs however you seek,
And every time you hear it creak
You wonder why they let it stay
When a man is buried and hidden away,
Many a day!

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

Eagle, your broken wings are tangled
Among the mountain ferns
On a ledge of rock on high.
Below the yawning chasm turns
To blackness, but the evening planet burns
Above the gulf in a gold and purple sky!

Vultures and kites
Fly to their rookeries
In the rocks
With swift and ragged wings against the lights.
From levels and from leas
Haste the returning flocks.
Foxes have holes and serpents the grass for flight.
Eagle, arise! It is night.

The world's wanderer finds you
As he climbs the mountains
In the unending quest.
Can you spread wings across the darkening chasm
To the craggy nest,
Where the foreboding mate lies still?
Croak for the evening star,
And beat your shattered wings against your breast!
Across the gulf the wanderer sees afar
A light in the house on the hill!

MARCIA

Madeline's hair is straight and yours
Is just as curly as tendril vines;
And she is fair, but a deeper color
Your cheeks of olive incarnadines.

A serious wisdom burns and glows
Steadily in your dark-eyed look.
Already a wit and a little stoic—
Perhaps you are going to write a book,

Or paint a picture, or sing or act
The part of Katherine or Juliet.
I believe you were born with the gift of knowing
When to remember and when to forget.

And when to stifle and kill a grief,
And clutch your heart when it beats in vain.

MADELINE

The heart that has most strength for feeling
Must have the strength to conquer the pain.

You understand? It seems that you do—
Though you cannot utter a word to me.
Marcia, Marcia, look at Madeline
Building a doll-house under the tree!

MADELINE

I almost heard your little heart
Begin to beat, and since that hour
Your life has grown apace and blossomed
Fed by the same miraculous power,

That moved the rivulet of your life,
And made your heart begin to beat.
Now all day your steps are a-patter.
Oh, what swift and musical feet!

You sleep. I wait to see you wake,
With wonder-eyes and hands that reach.
I laugh to hear your thoughts that gather
Too fast on your budding lips for speech.

Your sunny hair is cut as if
'Twere trimmed around a yellow crock.
How gay the ribbon, and oh, how cunning
The flaring skirt of the little frock!

You build and play and search and pry,
And hunt for dolls and forgotten toys.
Why do you never tire of playing,
Or cease from mischief, or cease from noise?

You will not sleep? You are tired of the house?
You are just as naughty as you can be.
Madeline, Madeline, come to the garden,
And play with Marcia under the tree!

IN THE GARDEN AT THE DAWN HOUR

I arise in the silence of the dawn hour,
And softly steal out to the garden
Under the Favrile goblet of the dawning.
And a wind moves out of the southland,
Like a film of silver,
And thrills with a far-borne message
The flowers of the garden.
Poppies untie their scarlet hoods and wave them
To the south wind as he passes.
But the zinnias and calendulas,
In a mood of calm reserve, nod faintly
As the south wind whispers the secret
Of the dawn hour!

I stand in the silence of the dawn hour
In the garden,
As the star of morning fades.
Flying from the scythes of air
The harebells, purples and golden glow
On the sand-hill back of the orchard
Race before the feet of the wind.
But clusters of oak leaves over the yellow sand rim
Begin to flutter and glisten.
And in a moment, in a twinkled passion,
The blazing rapiers of the sun are flashed,
As he fences the lilac lights of the sky,
And drives them up where the ice of the melting moon
Is drowned in the waste of morning!

In the silence of the garden,
At the dawn hour
I turn and see you—
You who knew and followed,
You who knew the dawn hour,
And its sky like a Favrile goblet.
You who knew the south wind
Bearing the secret of the morning
To waking gardens, fields and forests.

THE AWAKENING

You in a gown of green, O footed Iris,
With eyes of dryad gray,
And the blown glory of unawakened tresses—
A phantom sprung out of the garden's enchantment,
In the silence of the dawn hour!

And here I behold you
Amid a trance of color, silent music,
The embodied spirit of the morning:
Wind from the southland, flashing beams of the sun
Caught in the twinkling oak leaves:
Poppies who wave their untied hoods to the south wind
And the imperious bows of zinnias and calendulas;
The star of morning drowned, and lights of lilac
Turned white for the woe of the moon;
And the silence of the dawn hour!

And there to take you in my arms and feel you
In the glory of the dawn hour!
Along the sinuous rhythm of flesh and flesh!
To know your spirit by that oneness
Of living and of love, in the twinkled passion
Of life re-lit and visioned.
In dryad eyes beholding
The dancing, leaping, touching hands and racing
Rapturous moment of the arisen sun;
And the first drop of day out of this cup of Favrile.
There to behold you,
Our spirits lost together
In the silence of the dawn hour!

THE AWAKENING

When you lie sleeping; golden hair
Tossed on your pillow, seashell pink
Ears that nestle, I forbear
A moment while I look and think
How you are mine, and if I dare
To bend and kiss you lying there.

A Raphael in the flesh! Resist
I cannot, though to break your sleep
Is thoughtless of me—you are kissed,
And roused from slumber dreamless, deep—
You rub away the slumber's mist,
You scold and almost weep.

It is too bad to wake you so,
Just for a kiss. But when awake
You sing and dance, nor seem to know
You slept a sleep too deep to break,
From which I roused you long ago
For nothing but my passion's sake—
What though your heart should ache!

WILD BIRDS

The wild birds among the reeds
Cry, exult and stretch their wings.
Out of the sky they drift
And sink to the water's rushes.
But the wild birds beat their wings and cry
To the newcomer out of the sky!

Is he a stranger, this wild bird out of the sky?
Or do they cry to him because of remembered places
And remembered days
Spent together
In the northland, or the southland?

Is this the ecstasy of renewal,
Or the ecstasy of beginning?
For the wild bird touches his bill
Against a mate;
He brushes her wing with his wing;
He quivers with delight
For the cool sky of blue,
And the touch of her wing!

TULIPS

The wild birds fly up from the reeds of the water,
Some for the south,
Some for the north.
They are gone—
Lost in the sky!

In what waters do these mates of a morning
Exult on the morrow?
What wild birds will cry to them as they sink
Out of an unknown sky?
To whose cry will she quiver
Through her burnished wings to-morrow,
In the northland,
In the southland,
Far away?

TULIPS

Scarlet tulips,
Blood drops of the smitten day,
Wounds in the thighs of Diana;
Golden tulips
Dripped from the crucible of the April sun;
And you velveted magentas of listening passion;—
But tulip of scarlet and gold and magenta
More lovely than these,
By what grace may my desiring fingers
Touch and caress its delicate volutes,
Ravishing to the senses,
And the dim wanderings of love?

What poignant and spiced fragrance lurks here!
What yearnings more voluptuous than tears!
What dreams more delicious than those
Under the closed eyes of desire!
What tender thirsts for the ultimate nectar!
What shell-hued lips parted in wonder
Of the unconquerable Aphrodite!

Adorable flower whose petals
Rest over the mouth of the consecrated amphora,
And move, unfold and close again
Like undersea geraniums amid warm tides,
What nymph of the grove, or god of the upland
Was not kind that I have known its mystical secrets
Even to the stippled bud of the golden ovule?

CREATION

Passion flower unfolding in darkness!
Glow-worm under a spray of lilac!
Flame on the altar of love!
Beloved in your chamber!
The phœnix moon rising from the ashes of day
Spreads her wings of saffron fire
Above the enchanted garden.
And I brush away the leaves of night
To find the star of my love.
I part the curtains about the altar,
I enter your chamber, beloved.

I have entered your chamber, beloved,
I have found my star.
Between kisses and whispers
And the silken touch of flesh
Breast to breast, lips to lips,
Our souls are seeking and drifting!
As an albatross hovers and flies
With the running sea . . .
Powers of body, powers of spirit,
Divinities
Awakened never before,
Hidden in nerves asleep, in veins without a tide
Flow through us.
I give you my life, beloved,
For life of you, given to me—
O bride of love!

O hair of fire! O breasts of light,
Like double stars!
O voice like a lute that whispers
At midnight, in a bower of roses!
O body luminous as the nebulous waste
Across the midnight,
Pour on my breast, my hands, my brow
The sacred fire,
As our flesh becomes one
Upborne by your breasts,
White as bridal blossoms,
Where there is yet no milk,
But only eddying blood,
Circling in whirlpools of delirious ecstasy
In time with the blood of me.
Our lips together, our bodies together
While the yearning urn of porphyry
Waits to drink the silver stream,
And thirsts to drink,
And poises like a goldfish waiting
For the silver stream of fire. . . .

But oh, hands of me that clasp your sunny head,
Drawing it close to my breast,
In rapture of its beauty!
O temple of your spirit!
Spirit of you which I woo and would win,
In rapture without will,
In rapture blind, save for the inspired urge,
In rapture seeking further rapture,
In rapture to wed your spirit fully,
And all your spirit, which my spirit
Through the unity of flesh would reach
And win, and keep—
Bride of lightning!
Bride of Life!

As when the butterfly slowly moves his wings
Drawing from the virgin core of honeysuckles
The sweetest drop of dew:—

So pause his wings spread wide
When all is gained.

Goddess of the white dawn,
Let my beloved sleep—
Robins that sing at dawn,
Wake not my beloved!
I sleep with my beloved,
And she sleeps with me,
And a life sleeps now
That will wake!

THE WORLD'S DESIRE

At Philae, in the temple of Isis,
The fruitful and terrible goddess,
Under a running panel of the sacred ibis,
Is pictured the dead body of Osiris
Waiting the resurrection morn.
And a priest is pouring water blue as iris
Out of a pitcher on the stalk of corn
That from the body of the god is growing,
Before the rising tides of the Nile are flowing.
And over the pictured body is this inscription
In the temple of Isis, the Egyptian:
This is the nameless one, whom Isis decrees
Not to be named, the god of life and yearning,
Osiris of the mysteries,
Who springs from the waters ever returning.

At the gate of the Lord's house,
Ezekiel, the prophet, beheld the abomination of Babylon:
Women with sorrow on their brows
In lamentation, weeping
For the bereavement of Ishtar and for Tammuz sleeping.
And for the summer gone.
Tammuz has passed below
To the house of darkness and woe,

Where dust lies on the bolt and on the floor
Behind the winter's iron door;
And Ishtar has followed him,
Leaving the meadows gray, the orchards dim
With driving rain and mist,
And winds that mourn.
Ishtar has vanished, and all life has ceased;
No flower blossoms and no child is born.

But not as Mary Magdalen came to the tomb,
The women in the gardens of Adonis,
Crying, "The winter sun is yet upon us,"
Planted in baskets seeds of various bloom,
Which sprouted like frail hopes, then wilted down
For the baskets' shallow soil.
Then for a beauty dead, a futile toil,
For leaves that withered, yellow and brown,
From the gardens of Adonis into the sea,
They cast the baskets of their hope away:
A ritual of the things that cease to be,
Brief loveliness and swift decay.

And O ye holy women, who at Delphi
Roused from sleep the cradled Dionysus,
Who with an April eye
Looked up at them,
Before the adorable god, the infant Jesus,
Was found at Bethlehem!

For at Bethlehem the groaning world's desire
For spring, that burned from Egypt up to Tyre,
And from Tyre to Athens beheld an epiphany of fire:
The flesh fade flowerlike while the soul kept breath
Beyond the body's death,
Even as nature which revives;
In consummation of the faith
That Tammuz, the Soul, survives,
And is not sacrificed
In the darkness where the dust
Lies on the bolt and on the floor,

And passes not behind the iron door,
Save it be followed by the lover Christ,
The Ishtar of the faithful trust,
Who knocks and says: "This soul, which winter knew
In life, in death at last,
Finds spring through me, and waters fresh and blue.
For lo, the winter is past;
The rain is over and gone.
I open! It is dawn!"

CANTICLE OF THE RACE

SONG OF MEN

How beautiful are the bodies of men—
The agonists!
Their hearts beat deep as a brazen gong
For their strength's behests.
Their arms are lithe as a seasoned thong
In games or tests
When they run or box or swim the long
Sea-waves' crests
With their slender legs, and their hips so strong,
And their rounded chests.

I know a youth who raises his arms
Over his head.
He laughs and stretches and flouts alarms
Of flood or fire.
He springs renewed from a lusty bed
To his youth's desire.
He drowses, for April flames outspread
In his soul's attire.

The strength of men is for husbandry
Of woman's flesh:
Worker, soldier, magistrate
Of city or realm!
Artist, builder, wrestling Fate
Lest it overwhelm

CANTICLE OF THE RACE

The brood or the race, or the cherished state.
They sing at the helm
When the waters roar and the waves are great,
And the gale is fresh.

There are two miracles, women and men—
Yea, four there be:
A woman's flesh, and the strength of a man,
And God's decree.
And a babe from the womb in a little span
Ere the month be ten.
Their raptuous arms entwine and cling
In the depths of night;
He hunts for her face for his wondering,
And her eyes are bright.
A woman's flesh is soil, but the spring
Is man's delight.

SONG OF WOMEN

How beautiful is the flesh of women—
Their throats, their breasts!
My wonder is a flame which burns,
A flame which rests;
It is a flame which no wind turns,
And a flame which quests.

I know a woman who has red lips,
Like coals which are fanned.
Her throat is tied narcissus, it dips
From her white-rose chin.
Her throat curves like a cloud to the land
Where her breasts begin.
I close my eyes when I put my hand
On her breast's white skin.

The flesh of women is like the sky
When bare is the moon;
Rhythm of backs, hollow of necks,
And seashell loins.

I know a woman whose splendors vex
Where the flesh joins—
A slope of light and a circumflex
Of clefts and coigns.
She thrills like the air when silence wrecks
An ended tune.

These are the things not made by hands in the earth:
Water and fire,
The air of heaven, and springs afresh,
And love's desire.
And a thing not made is a woman's flesh,
Sorrow and mirth!
She tightens the strings on the lyric lyre,
And she drips the wine.
Her breasts bud out as pink and nesh
As buds on the vine:
For fire and water and air are flesh,
And love is the shrine.

SONG OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT

How beautiful is the human spirit
In its vase of clay!
It takes no thought of the chary dole
Of the light of day.
It labors and loves, as it were a soul
Whom the gods repay
With length of life, and a golden goal
At the end of the way.

There are souls I know who arch a dome,
And tunnel a hill.
They chisel in marble and fashion in chrome,
And measure the sky.
They find the good and destroy the ill,
And they bend and ply
The laws of nature out of a will
While the Fates deny.

IN THE GARDEN

I wonder and worship the human spirit
When I behold
Numbers and symbols, and how they reach
Through steel and gold;
A harp, a battleship, thought and speech,
And an hour foretold.
It ponders its nature to turn and teach,
And itself to mold.

The human spirit is God, no doubt,
Is flesh made the word:
Jesus, Beethoven and Raphael,
And the souls who heard
Beyond the rim of the world the swell
Of an ocean stirred
By a Power on the waters inscrutable.
There are souls who gird
Their loins in faith that the world is well,
In a faith unblurred.
How beautiful is the human spirit—
The flesh made the word!

IN THE GARDEN

Sounds of summer wind
From sunlit skies of afternoon,
Among the scented leaves of June!

Clouds! And heavens thinned
To shores of azure far away,
Calm as our love this summer day.

Love that is still as light
Shines round us and is ours
Amid the garden flowers.
There! How the sun-drunk oriole
Pours on the western wind his breath.
And now our hearts brim like a golden bowl
With the wine of love and death!

Sounds of summer wind,
And in our hearts the quiet star
Of love whose light has come afar!

MY LIGHT WITH YOURS

I

When the sea has devoured the ships,
And the spires and the towers
Have gone back to the hills.
And all the cities
Are one with the plains again.
And the beauty of bronze,
And the strength of steel
Are blown over silent continents,
As the desert sand is blown—
My dust with yours forever.

II

When folly and wisdom are no more,
And fire is no more,
Because man is no more;
When the dead world slowly spinning
Drifts and falls through the void—
My light with yours
In the Light of Lights forever!

HELEN OF TROY

On an ancient vase representing in bas-relief the flight of Helen.

This is the vase of Love
Whose feet would ever rove
O'er land and sea;
Whose hopes forever seek
Bright eyes, the vermeiled cheek,
And ways made free.

Do we not understand
Why didst thou leave thy land,
  Thy spouse, thy hearth?
Helen of Troy, Greek art
Hath made our heart thy heart,
  Thy mirth our mirth.

For Paris did appear
Curled hair and rosy ear,
  And tapering hands.
He spoke—the blood ran fast,
He touched, and killed the past,
  And clove its bands.

And this, I deem, is why
The restless ages sigh,
  Helen, for thee.
Whate'er we do or dream,
Whate'er we say or seem,
  We would be free.

We would forsake old love,
And all the pain thereof,
  And all the care;
We would find out new seas,
And lands more strange than these,
  And flowers more fair.

We would behold fresh skies
Where summer never dies
  And amaranths spring;
Lands where the halcyon hours
Nest over scented bowers
  On folded wing.

We would be crowned with bays,
And spend the long bright days
  On sea or shore;
Or sit by haunted woods,
And watch the deep sea's moods,
  And hear its roar.

Beneath that ancient sky
Who is not fain to fly
  As men have fled?
Ah! we would know relief
From marts of wine and beef,
  And oil and bread.

Helen of Troy, Greek art
Hath made our heart thy heart,
  Thy love our love.
For poesy, like thee,
Must fly and wander free
  As the wild dove.

THE HELPING HAND

Mother, my head is bloody, my breast is red with scars.
Well, foolish son, I told you so, why went you to the wars?

Mother, my soul is crucified, my thirst is past belief.
How are you crucified, my son, betwixt a thief and thief?

Mother, I feel the terror and the loveliness of life.
Tell me of the children, son, and tell me of the wife.

Mother, your face is but a face among a million more.
You're standing on the deck, my son, and looking at the shore.

I lean against the wall, mother, and struggle hard for breath.
You must have heard the step, my son, of the patrolman
    Death.

Mother, my soul is weary, where is the way to God?
Well, kiss the crucifix, my son, and pass beneath the rod.

THE OAK TREE

The oak in later August,
Before his leaves are strewn,
And the sky is blue as June,
Trembles from trunk to branches
For frosts that will be soon
From the valleys of the moon!

For breezes blown in August
Veer north with cold and rain;
And the oak tree sighs and shivers
For lights that shift and wane:
As a strong man sees the specters
Of age, disease and pain,
The oak flings up to heaven
His branches in the rain.

September comes, September
Spreads out a sky that chills.
The owl hoots and the cricket
Beside the roadway shrills,
And on the stricken hills.
But the oak tree, the oak tree
Still flaunts his shining leaves.
No change has come but swallows
Who fled the summer eaves!

But when October breezes,
And cold November gales
Descend upon the oak tree,
What strength of him avails,
Grown naked to the tempest
For life that sleeps and fails?
O oak tree, oak tree,
The winter snow prevails!
It cannot be your branches,
It is the wind that wails!

SIMON SURNAMED PETER

Time that has lifted you over them all—
O'er John and o'er Paul;
Writ you in capitals, made you the chief
Word on the leaf—
How did you, Peter, when ne'er on His breast
You leaned and were blest,
And none except Judas and you broke the faith
To the day of His death,—
You, Peter, the fisherman, worthy of blame,
Arise to this fame?

'Twas you in the garden who fell into sleep
And the watch failed to keep,
When Jesus was praying and pressed with the weight
Of the oncoming fate.
'Twas you in the court of the palace who warmed
Your hands as you stormed
At the damsel, denying Him thrice, when she cried:
"He walked at his side!"
You, Peter, a wave, a star among clouds, a reed in the wind,
A guide of the blind,
Both smiter and flyer, but human alway, I protest,
Beyond all the rest.

When at night by the boat on the sea He appeared
Did you wait till he neared?
You leaped in the water, not dreading the worst
In your joy to be first
To greet Him and tell Him of all that had passed
Since you saw Him the last.
You had slept while He watched, but fierce were you, fierce and awake
When they sought Him to take,
And cursing, no doubt, as you smote off, as one of the least,
The ear of the priest.
Then Andrew and all of them fled, but you followed Him, hoping for strength
To save him at length,

Till you lied to the damsel, oh penitent Peter, and crept
Into hiding and wept.

Oh well! But he asked all the twelve, "Who am I?"
And who made reply?
As you leaped in the sea, so you spoke as you smote with the sword;
"Thou art Christ, even Lord!"
John leaned on His breast, but He asked you, your strength to foresee,
"Nay, lovest thou me?"
Thrice over, as thrice you denied Him, and chose you to lead
His sheep and to feed;
And gave you, He said, the keys of the den and the fold
To have and to hold.
You were a poor jailer, oh Peter, the dreamer, who saw
The death of the law
In the dream of the vessel that held all the four-footed beasts,
Unclean for the priests;
And heard in the vision a trumpet that all men are worth
The peace of the earth
And rapture of heaven hereafter,—oh Peter, what power
Was yours in that hour:
You warder and jailer and sealer of fates and decrees,
To use the big keys
With which to reveal and fling wide all the soul and the scheme
Of the Galilee dream,
When you flashed in a trice, as later you smote with the sword:
"Thou art Christ, even Lord!"

We men, Simon Peter, we men also give you the crown
O'er Paul and o'er John.
We write you in capitals, make you the chief
Word on the leaf.
We know you as one of our flesh, and 'tis well
You are warder of hell,
And heaven's gatekeeper forever to bind and to loose—
Keep the keys if you choose.
Not rock of you, fire of you make you sublime
In the annals of time.

You were called by Him, Peter, a rock, but we give you the
name
Of Peter the Flame.
For you struck a spark, as the spark from the shock
Of steel upon rock.
The rock has his use but the flame gives the light
In the way in the night:—
Oh Peter, the dreamer, impetuous, human, divine,
Gnarled branch of the vine!

I SHALL NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN

If I could only see you again—
If I could only see you again!
How can it be
I shall never see you again?
For the world has shown it can roll on its way
And blot you out forever—
And I shall never see you again!
I thrill as one who slips on the edge of a gulf
When I think I shall never see you again!

As a dead leaf is hurtled over the tops of trees;
As a dead leaf is dizzily driven through woodland valleys,
I am driven and tossed in the storms of living.
But as the dead leaf escapes the breeze's fingers,
And sinks till it nestles motionless under a rock,
So in quiet moments I dream
Of you,
I dream of all that you were—
And I shall never see you again!

There never was any one like you!
There never yet was such joy in a heart,
Such strength to live whatever the fate,
Such love to love,
Such thought to see how life is good,
Such maternal passion,

Such breasts eager to nurse child after child—
And I shall never see you again!

Your breasts were made to suckle conquerors,
Warriors, prophets,
Invincible souls
Loving life, and loving death at last.
And now your breasts are dust,
You are all dust,
You are lost save for my memory.

And this morning I woke
As a leaf might wake in its sheltered place
Under the rock,
Stirred by a breath of April.
And I lived again the last time I saw you—
The last visit!
You were almost ninety then.
But there was the old zest in your heart
To do all things and have all things
Unchanged, as I had known them
As a boy.
You gave me the same room,
Nothing was changed,
Not a chair, a curtain, a picture.
And you came upstairs before it was day
And lighted a fire in the little stove
To have the room warm for me to dress in—
There was never love like yours!

And I went down to the kitchen and found you
Frying batter cakes, and laughing,
And bringing back my boyhood days
With the old stories.
And how you kissed me, and hugged me
With your withered arms!
And then you sat down with me,
And ate with me as of old,
And brought out priceless jars of things

Which you had made and saved for me!
The breath of memory stirs me
Under the rock.
I must have the madness of life to drive me,
To toss me
Into forgetfulness of my loss of you—
For I shall never see you again!

SLIP SHOE LOVEY

You're the cook's understudy
A gentle idiot body.
You are slender like a broom
Weaving up and down the room,
With your dirt hair in a twist
And your left eye in a mist.
Never thinkin', never hopin'
With your wet mouth open.
So bewildered and so busy
As you scrape the dirty kettles,
O Slip Shoe Lizzie
As you rattle with the pans.
There's a clatter of old metals,
O Slip Shoe Lovey,
As you clean the milk cans.
You're a greasy little dovey,
A laughing scullery daughter,
As you slop the dishwater,
So abstracted and so dizzy,
O Slip Shoe Lizzie!

So mussy, little hussy,
With the china that you break,
And the kitchen in a smear
When the bread is yet to bake,
And the market things are here—
O Slip Shoe Lovey!

SLIP SHOE LOVEY

You are hurrying and scurrying
From the sink to the oven,
So forgetful and so sloven.
You are bustling and hustling
From the pantry to the door,
With your shoe strings on the floor,
And your apron strings a-draggin',
And your spattered skirt a-saggin'.

You're an angel idiot lovey,
One forgives you all this clatter
Washing dishes, beating batter.
But there is another matter
As you dream above the sink:
You're in love pitter-patter,
With the butcher-boy I think.
And he'll get you, he has got you
If he hasn't got you yet.

For he means to make you his,
O Slip Shoe Liz.
And your open mouth is wet
To a little boyish chatter.
You're an easy thing to flatter
With your hank of hair a-twist,
And your left eye in a mist—
O Slip Shoe Lovey!

So hurried and so flurried
And just a little worried
You lean about the room,
Like a mop, like a broom.
O Slip Shoe Lovey!
O Slip Shoe Lovey!

EPITAPH FOR US

One with the turf, one with the tree
As we are now, you soon shall be,
As you are now, so once were we.

The hundred years we looked upon
Were Goethe and Napoleon.
Now twice a hundred years are gone,

And you gaze back and contemplate,
Lloyd George and Wilson, William's hate,
And Nicholas of the bloody fate;

Us, too, who won the German war,
Who knew less what the strife was for
Than you, now that the conqueror

Lies with the conquered. You will say:
"Here sleep the brave, the grave, the gay,
The wise, the blind, who lost the way."

But for us English, for us French,
Americans who held the trench,
You will not grieve, though the rains drench

The hills and valleys, being these.
Who pities stocks, or pities trees?
Or stones, or meadows, rivers, seas?

We are with nature, we have grown
At one with water, earth, and stone—
Man only is separate and alone,

Earth sundered, left to dream and feel
Illusion still in pain made real,
The hope a mist, but faith the wheel.

But what was love, and what was lust,
Memory, passion, pain or trust,
Returned to clay and blown to dust,

Is nature without memory—
Yet as you are, so once were we,
As we are now, you soon shall be,

Blind fellows of the indifferent stars
Healed of your bruises, of your scars
In love and living, in the wars.

Come to us where the secret lies
Under the riddle of the skies,
Surrender fingers, speech, and eyes.

Sink into nature and become
The mystery that strikes you dumb,
Be clay and end your martyrdom.

Rise up as thought, the secret know.
As passionless as stars bestow
Your glances on the world below,

As a man looks at hand or knee.
What is the turf of you, what the tree?
Earth is a phantom—let it be.

SOUNDS OUT OF SORROW

Of all sounds out of the soul of sorrow
These I would hear no more:
The cry of a new-born child at midnight;
The sound of a closing door,

That hushes the echo of departing feet
When the loneliness of the room
Is haunted with the silence
Of a dead god's tomb;

The songs of robins at the white dawn,
Since I may never see
The eyes they waked in the April
Now gone from me;

Music into whose essence entered
The soul of an hour:—
A face, a voice, the touch of a hand,
The scent of a flower.

FLOWER IN THE GARDEN

Flower in the garden,
Wholly itself and free,
Yearning and joyous,
Breathing its charm
To the passer-by
On the sighing air—
Beloved flower!
Flower desired for something beyond
Itself as a flower;
Giving the promise of ecstasy
Beyond its own being,
Its place in the garden—
A shadowed flame
Of an absolute!

Flower that I have taken
From its place in the garden
To realize the ultimate Beauty;
Flower in the vase at my side,
Breathing a sweeter life
Into the air I breathe,
A spirit that makes me faint,
Sorrowful with a strange languor.
Flower no less beautiful,
But revealing an essence
That changes my flower.

O, my flower that is with me but lost,
Lost in the disclosure of other hues,
Other scents!

Flower of passion, flower of love,
Flower that I have won and lost,
Mystical flower!

BOTTICELLI TO SIMONETTA

I would give you all my heart, and I have given
All my heart to you to have and keep
With your heart, where my heart has found its heaven
In a light immortal, and a peace like sleep.
Here is my heart, for you to have and treasure,
Your woman's heart will treasure it,
For a love that only love may find a measure,
And only a love like yours can measure it.

In absence and in separation praying
Before your love, my heart receive,
My heart which kneels to you, so gently laying
Hands of deep prayer, too reverent to grieve
For lives divided, yet compassionate,
As my poor heart is pitiful for yours.
These hearts of ours, that know so deep a fate,
Even as a heart that silently endures,
Lie on an altar of consuming fire,
Our hearts together, taking life thereof.
Ashes must come of two hearts which aspire
To God, who has given love.

NEITHER FAITH NOR BEAUTY CAN REMAIN

Neither faith nor beauty can remain:
Change is our life from hour to hour,
Pain follows after pain,
As ruined flower lies down with ruined flower.

Now you are mine. But in a day to be
Beyond the seas, in cities strange and new
To-day will be a memory
Of a day ephemerally true.

Last night with cheek pressed close to cheek
Through the brief hours we slept.
It must be always so, I heard you speak,
Love found, forever must be kept.

But already we were changed, even as the day
Invisibly transforms its light.
We prayed together then for dawn's delay,
Praying, praying through the night.

Against the change which takes all loveliness,
The truth our desperate hearts would keep,
The memory to be, when comfortless,
Save for the memory we shall yearn for sleep;

Against the sinking flame which no more lights
Our faces, neither any more desired
Through desireless days and nights,
And senses fast expiring and expired.

BRANCH MOLLUSCA

Here is a certain mollusk, any will do:
Two shells hinged with ligament, fluted and ridged
With waves concentric of stone, like waves which ensue
When a pebble is thrown in water. Its life abridged
By the sensitive plasm, which just to live secretes
Calcareous breastplates, lines the roughness inside
With nacre soft as silk—so the creature defeats
Hunting enemies, tentacles stretched with the tide.
Throws out on the surface points and beaks to protect
Even the shell from a reckless touch. Your blood
Will drip; perhaps there is something here to infect
Out of the scale on the shell, or the lethal mud

Curled up like a blasted leaf, and baring beneath
The shell clean white like a scar with cloths unwound:—
Here is my figure of speech of love and death,
Life that suffers, aspires, and yet is bound.

But again if sand grains sift between the shell
And the plasmic mantle, what can the creature do?
Handless, it cannot pick the grits, nor tell,
Voiceless, another to pick them, as I or you.
But as for us, are there no grits we keep
In our heart of hearts to scratch to a deeper pain?
Plenty enough, I think, as irritants too that heap
Substance of pearl around them out of the strain
Of the anguished life. Poems are dreamed out so
In silence and darkness, valves of the heart shut tight.
Have I hidden my soul? Am I cruel for silence? No,
I am making my pearl in the sorrow of day and night;
Drawing the life of me into the wound, the bruise.
I cover it up with thought, forgiveness, dreams:
This is my nacre of spirit, fiery ooze—
Perhaps in time there'll be a jewel that gleams!

Time, it may be will loose the ligament hinge,
Let my poor valves flap, the plasm spill.
Then you will see—a pustule? Better the fringe
Of cilia round the callous point of my ill.
Out of the spherical dent of a sudden will roll
The pearl of the best of me into your waiting hand.
Even we singers are voiceless soul to soul—
I would cut the hinge myself! Would you understand?
So to pursue our figure, life like this
Spawned in the water seeks for a place to rest,
A rock to fasten on, where it may grow, have bliss
At peace in the ocean's storms. A human breast
Seeks, I think, a place for growth. I phrase
The inner longing of spirits in words like these:
Where is the hand so kindred the passing days
Make it of nearer flesh for rapture and peace;
Loved as flesh to the dust it becomes; desire
To mingle dust with dust? If life there be

Beyond the death of the flesh, as fire with fire,
Spirit blent with spirit, rapt but free?

Say that is your hope and passion! Call it absurd,
Mere fumes of the ferment of will in living seed,
Clouding the sovereign thought. A soul is stirred
By follies, fancies, opens its valves to feed,
Even as mollusks do, where no food is,
But only pieces of grit that enter. You whirl
Down, close valves, your hunger has gone amiss—
Nothing is left but to grieve and to make your pearl!
Well, then we'll say I found you, let you know
My heart of hearts, for having you too for a time.
You turn away serving the self of you. So
I must live awhile and to live clamp shells of lime,
Seek to extrude the grit I find in my heart,
Throw my life in the task. No words are of use.
I open no more to your touch. You stand apart—
Your hand is bleeding. This is my soul's excuse:
Beaks and needle points on my shell were made
As action of inner self to the outer need.
Dried up scale of me sharp as a feather blade
How should I know it would make your hand to bleed,
Ever envenom you thus from the greenish scale?
This was the sediment out of the years I took
From the sea of living things to hide and veil,
Hued like the sea, myself. But open and look,
Here in my heart of hearts behold the bruise!
I cover it up with dreams, forgiveness, thought:
This is my nacre of spirit, fiery ooze—
The jewel is yours at last when the jewel's wrought!

LITHOGRAPHS AND LIFE

I

His face was calm nobility, and hers
A starry light . . . or so they seemed to us
As boys who hungered for the theatres,
And stared their lithographs, idolatrous.

LOVE AND BEAUTY

Dead twenty years, their names arose at tea
Just yesterday, and found my dream intact,
Till some one said: "Such tender constancy
Keeps bright their memory, though they could act.
Neither as friends nor artists could they part;
They could not wed, he had a wife, it seems."
And then the boy's illusion left my heart
To wander with them in a night of dreams,
Wherein she smiled: "You'll write our epitaphs
As lovers now, and not as lithographs."

II

"Yes, so I shall. But yesterday they said
One of you slept in England, one in France.
And here you come together from the dead,
Hand touching hand as in your life's romance.
Thus to be loyal lovers to the end!
The boy's dream passes. This is purest faith!"
"Lovers?" he asked. "We were as friend to friend.
Good friends, good friends," replied the woman wraith.
"Friends, and apart amid our closed careers
As actors, lovers—so all life must be.
I lived in England along the lesser years."
"And I in loneliness in Brittany."
Then I awoke to see a winter rain
Streaking the darkness on the window pane!

LOVE AND BEAUTY

I

There is a waste of sundown flags, and through
Their loneliness a stream that moves like grief.
And there are hearts that listen to the brief,
Quick aria of the lark that wakes to woo
The star dawn, sinking to a bowl of blue
Over a dune as golden as a sheaf
Of summer wheat. And there is Teneriffe,
And sea-girt forests, caves that hide from view,
Air garmented, rapt presences that thrill

To stand revealed. And there are windless vales
Of apparitions: bluebells, wintergreen;
And meadow moons, and planets on a hill.
There is this world of wonder, but it fails
Where Love is not, or vanished Love has been!

II

There are two deaths, if they be not the same:
One is to look on God, on Beauty one.
No soul has perished seeing God, for none
Has ever gazed into that Face of Flame.
But Beauty may be known of us. Her name
Is also Death, but not Oblivion
Through lightning. She is Memory begun,
Who lives to seal our souls up, and to maim
With gradual wounds, and make of every wound
An eye which looks on April through the light
Of Aprils gone. She is the Face whose sight
Changes the soul to crystal, ere the ground
The body takes, and hearses it in bright
Translucency of pain that makes no sound!

GOLDEN GATE PARK

(For George Sterling)

It was a day of light over the vernal sea,
Light and the fringe of foam on the soundless waves
Far down the cliffs; and green hills like the graves
Of gods long dead, yet brooding time to be.
Sound of the wind in our ears in a key
Of epic mourning out of the viewless caves
Of sunny skies; and distance that broods and craves
More than the heart can give. How silently
The earth floats here! How cool these soaring pines
Sphered in the crystal of this light! How slow
Beats now the heart! How comforted the flow
Of human passion here, that now divines
Through the spirit of the Pacific far below
What balm there is for death, for life what shrines!

THE FURIES

I

But you must act. And therein lies the way
Of freedom from the Furies. You must burn
The substance of your being, if you stay
The impetus of life you will not learn
The simples of salvation. Go pluck off
A serpent from Alecto's head and laugh
Exhilarate with its poison. If you scoff
You will perceive. You cannot love the staff
You have not scorned. You cannot weigh the act
You have not lived, the fear you did not prove.
Your soul was made to focus and extract
Through action every hatred, every love.
Pour out yourself if you would know release
From what the Furies do to spoil your peace.

II

Ambition that eludes, love never found
High hopes that tempt, or goodness still pursued
Have their own Furies, for this mortal ground
Breeds serpents from the blood of fortitude
And action as it does from listless fear.
You have aspired and fallen, curse the past
Till madness come! Be quiet, hide or sear
The memory of the dream, no less at last
The Sisters shall arrive! How do they come?
Your life grows round a moral governance
And you have served it. You are stricken dumb
To see it crumble spite of vigilance.
Now when you cannot think, rebuild, repair
The Sisters come and wheel your cripple's chair.

III

You were a fennel stalk that laughed and grew
With laughter till the life in you could use
The cells no further, then the cold winds blew,
And you fell whispering of the April dews.

Grown fair or foul the rhythmic force was spent,
The summer gone, your little past achieved,
Repulsions balanced, though you might lament
So much neglected, or too much believed.
You were a dry weed when a Great Hand seized
And bore you as a carrier of fire.
The garden you had grown in had not pleased!
Was this, perhaps, the end of your desire?
You lit a heap of leaves where children came,
The Furies meditating watched the flame!

DITHYRAMBS

PENTHEUS IN THESE STATES

I

Muse of the meditative hymn, and Muse
Of chronicles and the scroll, to us refuse
No gift to sing the daimon, the divine
God-head of Nature, Freedom and the Vine.
Nor less that Orpheus of the Mysteries:
Stars and the Soul and Heaven, and the Seas
Of tangible streams made light above the dust
Of this bewildering earth of Flesh and Lust.

II

First from what Thracian land
Did your attendants come
In coon-skin caps and jeans,
Into this wilderness, spanned
By mountains, to this home
Of the Corn-mother, clothed in variable greens
Of barley, oats and wheat?
Hither hurried your adventurous feet
From England, and from the hills
Above the Rhine, and out of the valleys
Of the populous plain
Of Lombardy, around the Seine,
You came
Like flame that follows flame!
From Galway, Lyons, Bergen, Budapest,
Onward you pressed,
With hearts that sank, and brave,
Like wave that runs to wave!
And from all northlands of new dreams, from ills
That stir the Spring awakening and the quest.
Thence were these swarming sallies
Into New England, and the great Northwest—
Virginia and Kentucky, Tennessee.

Thracians you were, attending Dionyse,
And seeking realms of Nature to be free.
Cider from orchards would have ease,
And wine from vineyards, to be planted
Where the roar of mountain torrents haunted
Heights of the pine and slopes of fragrant grasses
From plains to granite passes.
Rocks sealed with frost and ice which prisoned
The secret wine of Life new sensed and newly visioned
Flowed when the Spring of a great Age, and its Herakles,
Fire of the Sun of Liberty, melted the locks
Of ancient and forbidding rocks
Binding the torrent: human and divine
Strength and adventure: Mænads and Thyiades,
Bacchæ, Bassarides:
Spirits and evangels of new wine.
Mad Ones: armed for war.
And Rushing Ones: defying Strife.
Inspired Ones: trailing the Star
Of larger life.

III

And with this swift descent.
To this far Occident,
Tracking the gleam, the god, the freer fields:
Rejoicing, but in rites
For the Mystery, the delights
Of living and of thought, which molds and wields,
These hunters, fur-capped, like the devotees
Out of the Thrace of old, worshipping and defending
The wine-grower, and the temple-builder, Dionyse,
Carved from the fire-impregnate Earth the sovereignties
Of Maryland, New York, and Tennessee's
Mountainous realm, to the blending
Of foothills with the meadows of Illinois.
And made initiate in great liberties
The farther West, until the Orient sea's
Soft thunder lustrates California, bending
Above green water, clothed in purple and gold.
Carved these with hope their children would uphold,

And no hand would destroy
The altars of States heaped full of grapes and grain:
Births of the Sun and earth, to be adored,
And gathered in high festival and joy
From mountain side and plain;
And drunk from golden kantharoi,
God entering into man, thereby: restored
By the blood and flesh of the god, the lord,
To strength and vision to unveil
Deep mysteries and raptures, worshipings
Of nature, love for man, for deities
Quick intimations, quiverings through the wings
Of larger life, and sweeter music, cities
Of higher fellowships and lovelier ways
Of wisdom, where the phantoms of the Pities,
And the Hatreds, the Agonies
Of Melancholy, Madness, Soul's Disease
From horrors, and from idiot pieties
Are softened or dispelled in Freedom's praise.

IV

Pentheus in the tree-top spies upon
The wild white women, the dance, the festival.
And Judas spies on Jesus
In the epiphany of Orpheus out of Dionysus.
But the cup is drunk by the lover, the singer John.
Who, finding the ecstasy of sorrow, and sounding the deeps
Of love and vision, human and mystical
In the wine cup, oh, beloved guest,
Sinks in a moment of ineffable rest,
And rid of the flesh, half sleeps
Upon the Master's breast.
Judas alert for treasure and for treason
Dips in the sop his bread—
Judas the founder of the sect which fouls
The feast of Life, lizards and owls.
But where the liknon is borne, the cradle heaped
With fruits and flowers at the bridal feast,
O Dionysiac Christ, you passed the cup;
And at the supper of parting, O lovely priest,

At the time of the fan, and the purging of the floor,
You served the blood of the grape, and you did sup
With fur-capped fellows, and revealed the lore
Of remembrance for the mysteries you had spoken
Over the purple hills, and by the yellow shore
In wine quaffed and bread broken.

v

Thin lips where cruel smiles betray
Envy and frigid spirts, souls of gray,
Who will descend upon you, rend and slay?
Unknowers of the cycle of Man's day:
That nourished flesh grows spirit, and that wine
Is the oil of the lamp of the soul, and feeds the flame
That lights the world with Art! Who will waylay
Your spying and your hatred, limb from limb
Tear you, or drive you to a death of shame,
Like Judas self-hung? As if in paradigm,
Purple but horrible! Cut-throats of the rites
Of amity and dreams, the blossoming,
The release from the flesh to soul's delights,
Intenser life in soft intoxication—
And from that life, and rapturous elation
Who are you who will restrain,
Making a cult of undelivered pain?—
Through which men love and fashion, sing.
You false salvationists and street haranguers,
Self-drunk with soul suppression and perversion,
Who shout the terror of putrescence, never beauty;
You with suspicions of the peasant Persian;
You foul-breathed ranters of Duty
About these States, you vermin-eaten clangers
Of hog-ribs, paper tambourines:—
Degenerate instruments for an imbecile faith,
And mockeries of bright silver (touched by queens,
The Muses), and the ebony crotola.
You scarecrows of the Mænads and the Muses,
Breastless or babeless women who would vote
For rulership of other homes, not yours.
And you who moralize and gloat

On the refuse of banquets in the sewers.
You preachers of Denial and of Death,
And maniacs of repression which refuses
The cup of life! And in this bacchanalia,
You followers of Orpheus, as reformer,
Plain dressed in alpaca and string ties,
Who bellow forth your prophecies and curses
Not that man lives, but that man dies.
You carriers of umbrellas, not the thyrsos,
Or rifles of the fur-capped pioneers;
Slick spouters who fill fat penurious purses
Out of inevitable tears.
You Judases to Beauty, the sneak, informer,
Blind that all Canas must precede
The soul's Gethsemanes, that there can be
Save Cana strengthens, no Gethsemane;
And if no living then no heart to bleed
Its blood to make us like the god, the Christ.
No flower of spirit without root and vine,
Nor loveliness for our sakes sacrificed;
No beauty without wine—
You who these mysteries see not, or gainsay
Who will tear limb from limb of you and slay?

VI

You who behold no spirit in earth and sun,
And in their marriage no symbol of increase;
And you who plan or plot or brood, but run
About the wine press never, and who shun
The kinship which makes one of beasts and man,
Blossoms and vines and trees.
You who see not the mystery of food,
The ecstasy of the feast, replenishment
Of spirit in the wine-cup, and who ban
In fear or loathing, swooning of the blood;
You who can take as memory's sacrament
The wafer and the thimble of vapid juice,
And yet deny us, seekers of elation,
Re-birth through Dionysus, the youthful Christ:
Living, rejoicing in Life's thrilling spring,

Not grieving in its autumn and decline,
Bridal, not funeral wine
In the hour of memory and of parting;
You who forbid our ritual and our use
Of Nature's secrets, our illumination,
Our sleep, our peace,
Our freedom from the Fears, intoxication
In which our souls are paradised;
Our insight, charities, and our release
From the grave of the day's flesh, our Orphic lips
Through which we find creations, sunlit wings,
Love, wanderings of the soul, and fellowships—
You who these wisdoms see not, or gainsay
Who will tear limb from limb of you, and slay?

Will the old States never come to us, never again,
And the sovereignty of men,
In the mountains of our fathers, along the boundless plain?
Has the will of the people perished, or passed into the hand
Of the oafs and boors and lunkheads of the land,
And the bigot, Puritan,
And the martyrs to the martyrdom of Pain,
Seeking remembrance not for Life, but Death?
Have we given up the sister realms, the freedom of the States
Through a tyranny of shame
In the Southland where the black man wears the gag?
Shall we bear the blight of cities, charged to electorates
In the silence of the bearers of the flag?
Shall the cowardice of sycophants commissioned to obey
Defeat the trust, but call it still our voice?
Shall we who give you, as we wish, the choice
Of freedom to be solemn or rejoice,
Avenge not your injustice, nor gainsay,
Nor strew you limb from limb along the way?

INVOCATION TO THE GODS

I

Goddess, born of the mother of all things, the sea,
Goddess of beauty, goddess of rapture,
Goddess whose girdle is life,
Come down to us, O Aphrodite.
We are sunk in the slough of our shame;
We are torn with denials and fears,
Who have turned from thy altar,
And rejected thy worship
And mangled the gift of love
For the ritual of Mary the Virgin.
Come down to us that we may re-make ourselves
In the likeness of thy face—
We have no goddess like thee
O Aphrodite!

II

And thou, equal sister, O goddess
Whose temple yet stands enthroned rock-bound above
The grotto of Mary of Galilee,
Eternal symbol!
Come down to us:
Preserver of the state
In peace and war,
With the healing of harmonious thought.
Stern goddess of an equal law,
And ruler of the mind.
Guardian of temples and republics.
Lover and inspirer of the arts,
Come down to us that we may re-make ourselves
In the likeness of thy face.
We have no goddess like thee
Pallas Athena!

III

Thou soul of the Sun
And master of fire,

Law-giver, ruler, warder,
Founder of templed cities,
Founder of states invincible and free;
Thou voice of prophecy, wisest friend
Of commonwealths;
Lord of music, lord of words and sounds,
And brother of the Muses.
Come down that we may re-make ourselves
In the likeness of thy face.
We have no god like thee
O great Apollo!

IV

Of old amid the mountains sat the father
Of Gods and men!
Broad souled as nature, being nature.
Human and gracious, laughing, wise as time.
Ruler of earth and heaven—all but fate;
And promising no life that was not fate;
No wonder and no change
Beyond the rule of fate.
Great Zeus whose fruitful loins
Peopled Olympus
With gods and goddesses, well belovèd.
Not father of one son, but many sons;
Not father of one daughter, but many daughters,
Begotten of thee, immaculately,
Being begotten in nature.
Great father of redeemers who redeemed
Through truth which frees through being known,
Not faith in truth which is not known.
Beauty and not belief,
Mystical waters, curses, flames and death!
Come down, O Father Zeus, while we re-make
Our faces in the likeness of thy face.
We have no god like thee
O sovran Zeus!

V

Thou Thunderer, whose mood was wine and love,
Miraculous life, creativeness

Of color and sound,
Out of the lightning, out of the mist,
Out of the beat and urge of the sea,
Out of mountains, sacred groves and streams.
Thou king and father of the virgin daughter
Templed in pure, in deathless stone
In sacred Athens.
Not always striking at the foes of Hellas;
Nor sending fury on her enemies;
Nor bathing swords in heaven
To smite the foes of Hellas;
Nor treading grapes in anger;
Nor sprinkling blood on garments
To make all peoples worship thee, O Zeus!
Nor breeding worms that die not,
To make all peoples worship thee, O Zeus!
Nor stirring envy like a man of war
To make all peoples worship thee, O Zeus!
Nor preaching words of gladness to the meek;
Nor opening prison doors
To sound the day of vengeance,
To make all peoples worship thee, O Zeus!
Nor saying, eat the riches of thy foes,
And suck their milk;
And make them plowmen;
And take dominion over them and power.
I am the one, the only god, go forth
And make all peoples worship, I am Zeus!

VI

The hunted ghost of Delphos steals
From land to land.
Thy lyre has been weighed in the balances
Of the money changers, and rejected.
The Prince of Peace has brought the sword
Even as he prophesied.
All peoples are at strife
Between his ritual and the will to life.
Vengeance, hypocrisy and darkness
Are over us, we are vipers
Coiled in a cistern.

We wait for blood in the moon,
For darkness in the sun,
For a voice from clouds of glory:
Depart from me, accursed into fire.
I shut the gates of heaven
And burn the world with wrath!

Thou in Olympus tombed
With all thy sons and daughters,
Palace no more, a footstool
For Jehovah of Judea,
Come back that we may re-make ourselves
In the likeness of thy face,
O, father Zeus.
Wake when Jesus shuts
The gates of heaven,
And take us to Olympus!

O YOU YOUNG EAGLES!

O you young eagles!
Fluttering out of nests in the mountains of vision,
Whose peaks stand calm as crystal
Amid vast azures of liberties;
You who opened eyes upon sky girt seas of dawn,
And closed them amid the fraternal watchfulness of stars,
There in nests a century old,
O you young eagles,
Who seeing the sunlight of ascendant futures
Glistening the halycon freshness of your feathers,
And beat your golden breasts with your wings—
Eagles of the Republic to be . . .
O you young eagles!

From the plains you come, and the valleys,
From the hills and the forested rivers,
From shores of the sea, and miles of meadows,
From summits of green, and levels of gold,

And slopes of purple where long winds blow;
From measureless stretches of corn,
Waving incalculable flags of green
To the marching of states and races;
From mountains where gusted storms
Eddy the snow, you come.
Flapping expectant wings, and calling,
And streaming across the heavens
To touch gray towers and halls of ivy,
Pausing to drink, to feed.
Then on! Storming the sky with wings,
And scattering from the assaulted sun
Sparks on the earth as you fly.
Eagles of the Republic to be—
O you young eagles!

The kites and crows fly you,
And hide from you,
And whistle and croak for you.
The barnyard fowls run cackling,
And call for shelters and laws!
Noisy and harmless barnyard fowls!
Give them the picketed yard and the coop,
The earth is yours beside, and the peaks,
And the kingdom of clouds—
O you young eagles!

Who will gather you under his wings
After you have left the nest?
Only the wings of the sun shall gather you,
After you leave your golden eggs in the nest
To be changed to wings
By the breast of a rising sun.

Rejoice, young eagles,
For the long flight ahead;
For the ecstacy of the battles
On your way to the sun!

NATURE

Seas, mountains, rivers, hills, forests and plains,
Our earth that floats in heaven's translucent sphere,
And keeps us fosterlings, though man attains—
As a spider winds the nerve-white gossamer
From its own being, and unwinding sails
The heights—the secrets of the stars, the sheer
Chasms of space, and tears the vaporous veils
From Force and Distance. Nature! At the last
Our breast of consolation! Man exhales
Thereon the spirit which was on him cast
From that same breast at birth. But what you are
Remains, or on the mind of man is glassed
As you, remaining; while the farthest star,
The changing moon, the lessening sun, the sands
Of buried cities toll our calendar
Of dying days. Waters by starlight, lands
That slip or climb; leaves, blossoms, fruits contain
The flesh of wonder perished, and the hands
That sought with zeal or laughter, but in pain
To know you and themselves. Still nourishing,
Destroying, but unriddled, you remain!

Immeasurable Arc! To which our brief existence
Is a point, if relative, not understood.
With you endowed with motion and persistence,
Contained within you, is life evil, good?
Is life not of you? Is there aught without
By which to judge this restless brotherhood
Of will and water, and to quiet doubt
That life is good? And may the scheme deny
Itself when it is all, and rules throughout,
Knows no defeat, except as forces vie
Within it, striving? But, O Nature, you
Mother of suns and systems, what can lie
As God beyond you, making you untrue
To larger truth or being? You are all!
And man who moves within you may imbrue
His hands in war, or famine on him fall
Out of your eyeless genius, yet what wrong

Is wrought to your creating, magical
Renewal, scheme? What arbiter more strong
Than you are judges discord for the strife
That stirs upon our earth, wherever throng
Thoughts, forces, fires. What is evil? Life!
Even as life is struggle, whether it smite,
Or lift, as waves to waves in will are rife
With enmity. Whatever is, is right.
Like insects on a driftweed water-tossed
The sea of nature moves in man's despite,
While generations flourish and are lost.

Ether of the ethereal energy
Which whirls the atoms: Will in man. And soul
Which is to light as light to flame: the free
Soaring of man's thought. This is the dole
And tragedy of man: He has outgrown
His kinship with the beasts that kept him whole,
Through thought, which is not instinct, but would own
The unerring realm of instinct. Like a sun
He flares his thought in storms of fire, has flown
His symmetry and sphere, has wandered, won
No orbit for the beast's, which he has marred,
Departed from; must finish what's begun,
Until he be in spirit moved and starred,
Instinct regained to thought, his sun created
As far as flames have leaped; or leave the scarred
Black cavities of his hopes to beings fated
To grow therefrom to what he failed to reach.
Something within him drew the gods, and mated
His spirit to celestial powers. The breach
Between him and the beast is fixed. He sinks
In tangled madness, anger, railing speech,
Below the ape, or else he rises, links
His being to a life to which he climbs,
A realm of thought harmonious, while he thinks.
This is the tragedy of man, and Time's
Colossal task laid on him: Roll he must
The stone up to the peak against the slimes,
And fasten it, or let it make him dust,
Escaped his hand and crushing, still confess

That you, O Mighty Mother, yet are just
Who fling him down to failure, nothingness.
This is the tragedy of man: to learn
Your secret wishes, having learned to press
The heights of life, or ignorant still to burn
With questioning; and on this stage of earth
Live as they lived of old in a return
Endless, of useless labor, madder mirth.

Labor or Mirth! No matter—but to man,
And for an hour! And after that the sleep.
Waking or sleeping man fulfills the plan
Of you, O Mother. Other thought may creep
On man's defeated spirit, make him say
That you should weep, O Mother, if he weep.
But we are but ephemera in a play
Of tangled sunlight, and the universe
Of ages counts the minutes of our day,
And makes them of the ages. And the curse
That man deems his is not upon the far
And infinite existence. It could nurse
No evil in great spaces, sun and star
As great as man's to man, and not lie down
To death as man does. Hence if you unbar
To us, O Nature, nothing better, crown
Our hour with folly still, you give us rest
Among the mountains, meadows, and unclown
Our idot brows, and on your infinite breast
Rock us eternally under the infinite sky.

MONODY ON THE DEATH OF WILLIAM MARION REEDY

I

Son of the freer Republic, child of a day
More joyous and more vital and more blest
At the feast of Life; great heart, wise and gay,
Forgiving and compassionate, though ever stressed
Between the thorns, seeing afar the flower;
And living from hour to hour

In laughter for your wounds, or with a sigh
For the thickening brambles that around you pressed:—
April has come to me again and May
Since that July
When you sank gladly to a coveted rest,
Almost with your words to me upon your lips:
That immortality
Is not a promise, but a threat; that sleep
However eternal, or however deep
No more the worn out heart equips
For life again; cannot make whole
A liver and a dreamer, and a soul
That climbed, as you did, earth's precipitous steep.

II

You who had lived with books and walked the city
Of statesman and of priest,
Of money changer, theorist,
And knew the human heart thereby,
Saw with clairvoyant eye
Behind my irony and laughter, pity;
Behind indifference, desire;
At the core of me unquenchable fire,
Walled with impenetrable ice.
This I confess:
I strewed adversities to your love
With pride, with slow forgiveness
Of the world's ways. Yet for the strength thereof,
Born of that mystic brotherhood, which can rise
From kindred spirits, none the less
Was your love mine, even to the end.
You were my brother, O my friend!

III

The wages of Wisdom is Death:—
Shame, Fear, Want, Hate, Lust, Strife and Enmity,
All these you lived, and living them through
You survived them, but still knew
Their quality. At last from them made free
You stood in blossom, perfecter of bloom
At the touch of the sickle than ever in all your years.

Pure flame had conquered the reek and fume
Of the gross fuel of your nature, feeding
The light that lighted us, but to consume
Itself at last. O soul of eyes and ears
Open and heeding
Signs of all fair and foul in the land, all climes,
Riches of dead epochs, ancient times.
O human, worldly Augustine, in your tower
Watching the wavering lines of Want or Power,
Hailing and warning. Stylites of the rite
Of Epicurus (that happiness at the last
Is freedom) viewing the misty age
Atop a pillar of Zeus, and holding fast,
Through change and weariness, to work, in spite
Of clear conviction, nothing can assuage
The soul's desire. Though the flesh has food,
And water, and is satisfied,
Yet the soul must hunger for hope, for explanation
Of this insoluble task of life, defied
By every test of the human soul, still wooed
By flitting lights of faith and intimation.
Yet if soul father us could soul not do
For souls of us what water for our thirst
Accomplishes? Promethean, this you knew:
The restless search with which man's soul is cursed;
Yet brooding on it, still you dreamed
Of a city for all nations, consecrate
To the creative spirit of God in man;
Guardian angels were to you revealed
In labor with man's fate,
Uplifting the human spirit, like a flame,
Consoled, redeemed,
Strengthened and purified and healed,
To the silent, eternal life from whence it came.

III

To this you have gone. I saw your artist hands
That had so little rest
Folded in quietness upon your breast.
Whether the dead find peace, or loose the bands

Of some intenser rhythm, still with peace
Your face was sealed, as of a great surcease:
Like sculpture, tideless streams,
Or winter woods, or windless skies,
Or sleep that has no dreams.
Those spheres of flame, your ever wandering eyes,
Were turned within to a realm more deep,
Where death's great secret seemingly was known
As some clear, mild Simplicity! Or 'twas sleep
Of the unborn that stilled them, or the void
Of the dead seed never sown. . . .
You were no more to me, whatever death is.
I stood alone,
Empty of hand, save for the heritage
Of what you were:
A voice, a light, a music of deep tone,
Which life made richer, and the age,
And something of heaven employed
To be for us our best interpreter.
You were our star of empire lighting
The path of peoples more and more
To a freer day! O voice of you which woke
Rapt listeners over the earth.
Out of your ashes wings of memory soar
To carry the message of your life and worth.
Death of your body was the clearer birth
Of the spirit of you, shining afar
Upon our day and days to be:
As evening winds blow coldly, yet make free
From mist and hovering cloud
The Western Star!

HYMN TO THE DEAD

O, you who have gone from the ways of cities,
From the peopled places, the streets of strife,
From offices, markets, rooms, retreats,
Pastoral ways, hamlets, everywhere from the earth,
And have made of the emptiness of your departure

A land, a country, a realm all your own,
Set above the hills of our vision, an empire
Within, around, above our empire of days,
Of pain and clamorous tongues;
An empire which out of a sovereign silence
Stretches its power over the restless multitude
Of our thoughts, and the ceaseless music of our beings,
And surrounds us even as the air we breathe—
O ye majestic Dead, hear our hymn!

The clown, the wastrel and the fool in life
Are lifted up by you, O Death!
The least of these who has entered in
Your realm, O Death,
Is greater than the greatest of us,
And by a transfiguration has been clothed
With the glory and the wonder of nature.
He has drunk of the purple cup of apotheosis,
And passed through the mystical change,
And accomplished the cycle of being.
He has risen from the lowlands of earth
Into the air on wings of breath.
He has rejected the shell of the body, feet and hands,
He has become one with the majesty of Time,
And taken the kingdom of triumph,
Whether it be cessation or bliss.
For he has entered into the kingdom of primal powers,
Being or ceasing to be,
Even as he has re-entered the womb of nature.
Or he has found peace,
States of wisdom, or vision—
Hail! realm of Silence,
Whence comes the unheard symphony too deep for strings,
Hail, infinite Light,
Darkness to eyes of flesh—
All hail!

What are we, the living, beside you the dead?
We of daily hunger, daily food, daily ablutions,
The daily rising and lying down,

Waking and sleep;
The daily care of the body's needs;
And daily desire to pass the gift of life;
And daily fears of the morrow to come;
And daily pains for things that are gone;
And daily longing for things that fly us;
And sorrow that follows wherever we go;
And love that mocks us, and peace that breaks,
And shame that tracks us, and want that gnaws.
But O ye Dead! Ye great ones,
Triumphant over these, released
From the duties of dust, all chains of desire,
And made inhabitants of breathless spaces,
Immanent in a realm of calm,
Rulers of a sphere of tideless air,
Victors returned from the war of death in life,
Victors over death in death!

For the growing soul turns in
Even as the seed turns in on itself,
And becomes hard, transparent,
An encased life, condensed
In the process of saving itself
From rains that beat in the fall,
And frosts that descend from skies grown cold.
And we who shed away old thoughts and hopes,
Days and dreams of life,
Turn in, grow clear like grains of rice,
Until the realm of death
Is as snow delivered land
Luring the seed—
And it becomes our home, our country,
Our native land that calls us back
From this sojourn of adventure,
And place of profit;
For O ye majestic Dead, your absence draws us,
If it be naught but absence still you summon,
Your absence has become a very Presence,
A power, a hierarchy of Life!

Even as leaves enrich the earth
Layer on layer,
Even as bodies of men enrich the soil
Generation on generation,
So do the spirits of those departed
Enrich our soil of life
With delights, wisdoms, purest hopes,
And shapes of beauty.
But oh beyond all these, is our life enriched
With exalted contemplations
Of you, O glorious Dead,
Who have eaten of the tree of life and become gods,
Friendly divinities to us who remain,
Dear familiars, as you were with us
Fathers, children, lovers, friends.
Ye we sense with the inner eye,
Since nothing in our days of living
Moves uncolored of your splendors,
Presences to which all things relate!

O realm of the Dead,
Black Mountain, if you be,
Which darkens heaven,
And shadows earth,
Round which our spirits flutter
Like startled moths.
Black mountain with whose blackness
The light of life is mixed,
Whereof all hues are made:
All thoughts, all lofty wanderings of the soul,
All meanings, divinations
Of briefest hours, and frailest joys,
All wonders of the spectrum of the soul
Out of life and death!

Realm of the Dead! Supreme Reality
All Hail!

PALLAS ATHENE

Athene! Virgin! Goddess! Queen! descend,
Come to us and befriend!
Set up your shrine among us and defend
Our realm against corruptions which impend!

Divinity of order and of law,
Most powerful and wise,
Our land reclaim.
Patron of the assemblies of the free,
Our cities shame!
Dethrone our bastard Demos, partisans
Of Moody, Campbell, all the Wesleyans.
Come down with awe,
Enceladus and Pallas strike, who rise
Against your father and his hierarchy.
Smite the giants Superstition, Force,
Fanaticism, Ignorance and Faith
In village gods, and bury them beneath
Volcanic mountains. Yoke them to the course
And labor of your wisdom. Fling your shield,
Medusa faced, before the brows of clay,
Who rule our clattering day;
Flash it before their brows and make
Stones for the pavement of the way
Whereon you drive your chariot, golden-wheeled.
Descend, O Goddess, for the memory's sake
And for the hope's sake of your son,
Franklin, your herald, Washington,
Who dreamed to make perpetual
Our Parthenon, column, court and hall.
And save it from the donjon, minaret,
The cross, the spire, the vane, the parapet!

We have no god but Jesus,
No god but Billiken.
Nature and Dionysus
Come back again!

Jehovah is an alien tyrant, rules us
From arid Palestine,
Who mouths a heaven that fools us,
And curses the olive and vine,
And the smiles of the lyric nine.
Gods are they, hard and full of wrath
Who drive us on the unintelligible path.
Gods are they, and unreckoning of their work
Too puerile or despotic, or with feet
That drip blood on a mercy seat.
They nerve our hands with hatred's dirk,
Or weaken us with poison sweet;
Drug us to mumble this is life, who feel
In our delirium, no less, that life
Is an ocean that breaks the grist stones and the wheel
Set up to feed this world of strife
By Mary's son, Mary the wife!
Come from the Islands of the Blest,
Goddess, and give us wisdom, vision, rest.
Reveal a Beauty for our hearts to love.
The wooden ark of Moses, overlaid
With strips of gold,
And all the spurious covenant thereof
By which our life is obelised
We would no more behold,
Who have so vainly with it temporized.
Fruitless our spirits have these centuries prayed
Before the Janus cross,
The oracle that speaks in riddles, asks
Penitence, obedience, tasks
Which nature interdicts.
We are the body on the crucifix,
Not Jesus; we, the race, are crucified,
And die upon the cross,
For centuries have died.
Come and restore our loss
Of truth, the eyes of spirits undeceived,
Courage with nature, strike the opiate joss
To ruin with your sword,
O most adored!

Give us Reality, O lover of men,
Republics, cities, lands.
Uplift our eyes to Beauty, once perceived
We may rebuild the Areopagus,
With wiser eyes and hands.
Bring Thought, the Argus, consciousness
That looks before and after,
And grace perpetual of Mnemosyne—
Remembering we shall be free!
Save us, O Goddess, from the drifting crowd,
Wondering, witless, loud,
The lovers of the minute who possess
No reverence and no laughter!

Goddess! with silver helmet, guardian
You may be, if we worship at your shrine,
Before the gates of Boston and New York,
Chicago, San Francisco, through the span
Of continents and isles; your heart incline
Toward our turbulent blood from many climes,
Worships and times.
Lift from our necks the brass and jeweled torque
Of restless zealots and of idiot mouths;
The locusts swarm, the land is cursed with drouths,
Bring rain and dew,
Plant olive trees,
Set on our hills the emblem of the vine;
Bring to our hearts the lofty purities
Of song and laughter, wisdom, and renew
Temples of beauty and academies!

Set up your golden altar
In Parthenons in every village and shire.
The crucifix and psalter,
The ikons and the toys of vain desire
We cast into the fire.
We keep the lover Jesus, for his hope,
His humanism and his flaming zeal.
He will approach your altar, he will kneel
At last before you, for the horoscope

Of life misread in youth,
And youthful dreams and faith.
Goddess! our globe that hungers for the truth
Between the roar of life, silence of death
Cannot be stayed or cowed. But, oh, descend
First to our soil, Atlantis, and befriend.
Make us a light across the fathomless sea
Of centuries to be,
Even as Athens is, divinity!

DEMOS THE DESPOT

Not in the circus before your thumbs inverted,
Demos, the despot, do we stand;
But amid the swarming half-born girted,
And amid the idiot millions who command
Have we our freedom reasserted—
Rule us you cannot, though you rule the land.

Frederick and Charles and Philip the misbegotten
Destroyed the body with fagots and with fetters,
Until the finger magic of movable letters
Choked the mouth of a world that they made rotten
With blood and corpses. But, O Demos, you
Plague us with dwarfs that trip us, run and hide;
Foul us with frogs that froth our ancient wine;
Scourge us with locusts, and with snakes that twine,
And hiss but do not kill. With lice subdue
Our patience, and our time divide
In seeking the favored hour. And then you say:
Have you not freedom, pray?
Do you not think and print? You do not bleed
For freedom's sake! You do not die at once.
And if you starve, have you not had your way?
We let you print, but do we have to read?
Or suffer what you print to be displayed?
What you call liberty affronts
Our white-frog breasts, the laws we made.

All rightful rights remain.
Neglect and want shall be your ball and chain
If you trespass our rules—
In other times you would be burned or slain!

Such being the freedom that you grant, O Demos,
Our olden task is this: we fire the rushes
Of yesteryear, and beat with sticks of truth
The little snakes and dwarfs that hide in bushes;
Drain the dead water, set exhilarant youth
With plows upon the musty marsh to turn
The scum and green decay, and chase the frogs.

Then after we cut and drain and burn
All will be sweet and clean awhile.
But soon the weeds and crawlers will defile
Our labor. Then the demagogues
Will lead the chorus of the frogs:
This is the land, this is the field,
This is the age of freedom, long revealed.
This is the age most blest,
This is the country freest, best,
This is the country that fulfills
Ancient hope and prophecy,
This is the age, this is the land,
The land, the age, the realm most free. . . .
Then in that hour we shall be dancing,
And feasting with new gods upon the hills;
And graving images of lovelier Beauty;
And building altars of a purer Duty;
And singing rituals of a deeper Faith.
And living life, and facing death
As fairer gods would have us. And for you
O frogs, the fated sharers
Of all we dream and do,
We, the dreamers, the preparers,
Shall then be gathering strength to burn
Bushes and plow again
The frog marsh and the weedy plain!

NEW YORK

No one knows his birth,
And of his death none knows, save that he sank
With a famished crew, and that the earth
Had not his grave, this Hudson, who once came,
And found and named the river, while his men
Landed upon Manhattan, where Adriaen Block
First lifted the roof and frame
Amid the forestry and the rock
Of lower Broadway, now
A massed pueblo of spires and towers,
Around which snarl the wool of mid-sky clouds!
They vanished and were forgotten, and the plow
Of the Dutch erased their graves, as the sightless hours,
Blind as the hours we live, spawned the immeasurable crowds
That overflowed that Wall street, walled to keep
The village safe, and keeps the city safe.
They vanished. Their potter's fields were turned
To the city's parks and avenues. Their boweries passed
To taverns, markets, gardens, noisy squares,
And then to bolted steel at last. . . .
Then there was war. And here was many a forge
To fan a revolution's dying coals.
They wrecked the statue of King George
For bullets with which to fight him. Putnam, Knox,
Walked Broadway, Wall street. Here were tolls
Of bells for the first martyrs; here along the docks
Walked Washington; and here were bells
For Lafayette returned, and later for
The Union saved, for Jenny Lind who came
To Castle Garden! Here strutted that Hamilton
Whom Burr killed, and then ambled to old age.
And Lincoln still a western name,
Tall sycamore of the Sangamon,
Beheld a Broadway, and the equipage
Of buses, carriages, and the rush
Round Fraunce's tavern, Niblo's streets of want,
The pear tree of old Peter Stuyvesant.

And through the mist of an ancient cycle hid
The house and recreant fame of Captain Kid. . . .
And here in time came Grant,
Who smoked and dealt in shares,
In an age of gilt and plush.
Greeley and Bryant walked these thoroughfares;
Morse, Fulton, Irving, Halleck and Freneau;
And starving amid that era's bulls and bears
With his captured Raven passed bewildered Poe.
And Whitman rode the buses. But there were wars and death—
They vanished: Jackson, Webster, Clay,
Princes, philosophers, clowns, showmen, dudes,
Barnums, McAllisters, Dickens, Thackeray.
They went to their places of slumber and no breath,
Where eternity over them broods,
In the South, the North, the West of the prairie land.
They went to their sleep on many a distant strand.
But the city spread its roots and flowering too,
And changed, but ever youthful, kept its age,
Its memories, becoming ever new. . . .

Then the crags and boulders miles removed
From the boundaries that even Roosevelt saw,
A place of goats and pigs, where children roved,
And Shantytown was noisy, became the spoil
Of the Fate made blind, and driven by the law
Which favors those who never toil,
And wrongs the toilers: this blossomed the rocky soil
Far out with marble, copper, where once stood
The country mansion, amid the meadow and the wood;
With Wall street grown a man-made mountain pass;
And Broadway an aisle of comets, and the spires
Of proud built churches sunk amid the mass
Of a granite mesa, and the tires
Of invisible wheels whirled under the river, and beneath
The rock foundations of the island, and the breath
Of tropic troubled leaves released to bear
Steel wings over the city's gold and blue and fires
Countless as stars, or the lights of Babylon,
Memphis and Rome made one!

City of the ever emancipating sea,
Whose winds and diverse paths invite and keep
Mankind in freedom, as it makes them free!
City of workers, city made rich through breeds
From every land, which gives, but first transmutes
The South, the North, the West, as a flower that feeds
Through a tangle of extended roots.
City of widest, happiest democracy
In all this realm of battered faiths, made cheap
By the demagogue, the bigot, by the gold
Which dullness gathers! City where Protestant
And Jew and Catholic,
And stocks from the farthest climes live tolerant souled
In a community whose politic
Makes the laws closer to life, laws therefore more obeyed.
Here is no hooded hate, willing the law it wreaks;
No one-eyed vision of life, no solemn cant
Unwithered before the light of laughter, which seeks
And kills the false in the true arrayed:
The death rays of keen spirits, which unmake
Philosophies, pretenses, specious fames.
City, whose lawlessness is heralded—
At corner groceries—, but of no flames
Burning the untried negro at the stake.
Nor demanding silence as the price of bread
Laid upon Science, nor imposing fraud
Upon the voter franchised, but overawed,
But which considers, hears each novel truth!
Pleasure is a democracy, and its cup and press
Are cruel with the recklessness of youth,
Not with the acrid dregs of righteousness.
Reviled about the hustings, in undertones
Its vices whispered, so to frighten and coerce
With the horror of raw head and bloody bones
Laws for the feast, and for the purse.
When all this land, its cities, little towns,
And farms should know each other and respect
Environment and custom, blood and sect,
And that wise truth that made us free
By local rule and the State's sovereignty.

Though the money game, the country frowns,
The country plays with every trick of skill
Which the city uses, for trade is but trade,
Be the game awkwardly or wisely played. . . .

What workers and what work here, strength and health!
What children thick as minnows swarm
The Russian quarter, Judea, around the shrines
Of Nathan Hale, and Joan of Arc, in the warm
Evenings, and sing and shout, pursue:
These builders of the city's future wealth.
What old men and old women, wrinkled and gray
With the battle of life and many a doubtful year.
Yet lusty as the fabled pioneer,
Sit on the crowded steps of the noisy streets,
And talk and watch the children, or behold
Funneled Leviathans swing into docks
From ports they loved and left to labor here!

POEMS OF REFLECTION

THE TAVERN

(*For my daughter Madeline*)

Nothing disturbed my night of sleep,
I wonder that I ever woke
It was so heavy, was so deep
I scarce had heard the thunder-stroke.
So what was drinking, feasting, talking
By guests who came and guests who went,
Or those who spent the time in walking
The halls and rooms in argument
About the Tavern? Some declared
No better Tavern could be built.
And others called it a deception,
Its purest gold but thinnest gilt,
A cruel cheat considering
No other Tavern gave reception
To folks who might be wayfaring
Anywhere in the whole wide land.

I woke a stranger to it all,
But quickly grew to understand
The ways and customs which prevailed:
Those who won favor, those who failed;
What feasting rooms had echoed laughter;
What kisses stolen in what hall;
What corners where the old had cried;
What stairways where the breathless bride
Paused for a moment just to toss
Among the bridesmaids her bouquet;
What rooms where men in work or play
Approved or cursed for gain or loss
The Tavern's roof-tree, roof and rafter.

Then when I woke, as I have said,
Save a few children, there was none

Who was not older far than I.
Many were trembling, gray of head;
The strong walked forth in rain or sun
And seemed all danger to defy.
All welcomed me and called me fair,
And told me strange events which passed
Around the Tavern while I slept.
Soon there were changes. Scarce aware
Of their departure many stept
Out of the door and seemed to cast
Their fortunes elsewhere, but as fast
New guests came in to take the places
Of those who left. And through the day
I lost the old, remembering faces
Freshly arrived. When it was noon
I knew what things were opportune,
I had become one of the crowd.
In all their ways initiate:
Knew what their love was, what their hate,
Myself stole kisses in the hall,
And saw the old who sat and cried
In corners, saw the rosy bride
Pause for a moment just to toss
Among the bridesmaids her bouquet,
Where I stood best man to the groom.
Was myself of the noisy room,
Where men in work or men in play
Approve or curse the gain or loss.

Toward afternoon I seemed to feel
More people knew me than I knew.
Then it was good to meet with you.
I saw you as you left the stair.
And who were you? I do not dare
To praise your brow, or paint your hair,
Your eyes how gray, or were they blue?
A pain strikes through me if I let
The full strength of my love have sway.
I only know I can forget
All others who had gone away
Remembering our happy day

THE PARTY

Together in the house and yard.
It was to you all fair and new.
You listened with such rapt regard
To all the stories of the guests,
And what had been their interests,
And was the Tavern just the same
As it had been before you came,
You asked me, and I answered, yes,
No change, my dear, not even the name.

No change, except the people change,
And change they do, I must confess.
In truth a few alone remain
Of those who lived here when I first
Entered the door there, most are strange.
And as I rose much earlier
Than you arose, you may suppose
I shall grow drowsy, yet who knows,
Before you do, and leave the stir
The dancing, feasting, just to creep
Back for another night of sleep.
I'd like so well to stay awake
And watch the dancing for your sake.
It may be, though it scarce may be—
No one remained awake for me.

You cannot fail to find the bed
When you are sleepy, but no doubt
It will be black with the light out.
Come dear, that sleep is loveliest
Where side by side two lovers rest,
That sweetens sleep—it may be best!

THE PARTY

Our wishes not consulted whether
We chose to come, not even the hour,
Some would have asked for fairer weather
Than on a day of sun and shower.
No chance to choose! And some got wet,

Were sick and nervous while they stayed;
Others came in the sun, the debt
Of Fortune to them overpaid.
We all came ignorant, willy-nilly,
Pellmell, piebald, grave and silly,
Resistless to the party drawn,
Which had gone on and would go on
From dawn to night and night to dawn.
Though some, it seemed, had scarcely come
Before they left; and some at noon,
Or morning bade adieu. The moon
Saw others take departure home.
All talked about it as you would;
Esteemed it dull, over too soon,—
Bad, sad, or wearing, very good!

Over too soon! Yet truth to tell
It was a lasting festival.
Guests had to leave—and that was all.
To each some different thing befell.
The party went on just the same.
First guests departed, late arrived;
Fresh candles burned with brighter flame;
New cakes were cut, and laughter thrived
Over a wit re-sharpened. Crumbs
Of eaten things were brushed away;
Dishes were cleared and lovelier bowls
Were piled with new-picked grapes and plums.
The place the while was mad and gay
Because of sad and merry souls.
There was a room for love's romancing;
A room for talk, a room for dancing;
A room for globes and maps and books;
A room with skylights, a room of nooks;
A room of pictures, marbles, bronzes;
Guns, gauntlets, spears, armor, sconces;
A room of racks and torture hooks;
A room of ikons, shrines and josses;
A room of crosiers, cups and crosses;
A room—but everything was here

That brain can think of, plan or make
To shackle spirits, honor brows,
To thrill the heart, or start the tear,
Or stir a rapture, or an ache—
It was a wonder house!

I noticed this: You enter with
Fellow arrivers, ill at ease.
The rooms are full, and some of these
Know you, but only with their eyes
Acknowledge you in mild surprise.
Listen! and you will get the pith
And meaning of what went before
From these. The high ones talk in myth,
Who own the rooms—in loose ellipsis
Show what their tried-out fellowships'
Inner communion is and lore.
But kinder souls say: "Some one great
Was here before you came." "This thing
Happened this morning." "Look! that one
Just going out, is so and so."
"There comes the waiter with your plate!"
"You should have heard that woman sing!
She's going!" "Oh, we've had such fun."
"What happened? What's ahead? Its slow!"
Late stayers stare your ignorance:
"Why don't they tell us?" "Oh, no use,
You wouldn't understand. You'll know
Later, perhaps, by happy chance.
And if you don't, it's too abstruse,
We have no words. Feed on and run
The rooms around. You'll see what we
Have felt, seen, suffered and enjoyed."

And so it is to father and son,
Mother and maid. Then what should be?
The bell rings, some are glad, annoyed:
New guests are coming, and for some
The Chauffeur rings, the Car has come!
And we who were the novices,

And wondered, stared, deferred, inquired,
Are now in charge and take amiss
Curious questions, have acquired
The Party's manner, secrets, speech.
And see, as those before us saw,
New and old groups are troubled, each
Is deaf and dumb. How can we draw
Their wordless wonder to the point?
What would you know? How can we reach
And vocalize your dumbness? What
To ask of us you do not know,
And what to tell you we know not—
Groups, therefore, clearly out of joint.

Yes, but they do not know us now.
Most here are strange. Where is the throng
With whom we came? Where is the brow
Sunny of hair, the voice of song?
Where is the hand that understood,
Without a word. There's none to hear,
And know our meaning as he would . . .
New wine is opened. No more wine!
New cake is cut. I must instead
Drink brandy, bitters, heavy beer.
I rather like this coarse, black bread.
Strange music plays, not high and clear.
No matter! For you might inspect
The pictures, marbles, once again,
Look at the books some more, correct
First errors. Surely that were well.
And you can do it, having fared
So differently. Was that the bell?
"Your chauffeur's here!" "Why speed me so?"
"Too bad! Too bad you have to go!"

Yes, but the party's over! No?
Over for me. And I am tired.
Desire for what I once desired
Is dying or is satisfied.
Tell him to wait a moment—yes

THE GARDEN

I wish to see what may betide;
Watch the newcomers laugh and feast;
Watch eyes that glance, and breasts that heave;
Watch cunning, aspiration, pride;
Watch soldier, statesman, poet, priest;
Watch those who doubt and who believe,
Untangle, tangle, spin and weave.
I've helped to make the party, still
The party is not to my will.
I can re-make it, now I know
How to enjoy it better, use
Its hour more wisely. "By your leave.
Just wait a moment!" "Well, your car
Is at the door and must not park;
The way you go is rather far,
Besides it's growing dark."

Bowed out! No matter! I am due
At a better party, so they say.
Tomorrow is a better day—
Always tomorrow. "What of you?
You're coming? Well, I hope you may."
"Meantime good night, a safe return,
And blessings on your way."

THE GARDEN

I do not like my garden, but I love
The trees I planted and the flowers thereof.
How does one choose his garden? Oh, with eyes
O'er which a passion or illusion lies.
Perhaps it wakens memories of a lawn
You knew before somewhere. Or you are drawn
By an old urn, a little gate, a roof
Which soars into a blue sky, clear, aloof.
One buys a garden gladly. Even the worst
Seems tolerable or beautiful at first.
Their very faults give loving labor scope:
One can correct, adorn; 'tis sweet to hope

For beauty to emerge out of your toil.
To build the walls and fertilize the soil.
Before I knew my garden or awoke
To its banality I set an oak
At one end for a life-long husbandry,
A white syringa and a lilac tree,
Close to one side to hide a crumbling wall,
Which was my neighbor's, held in several
Title and beyond my right to mend—
One cannot with an ancient fee contend.

Some houses shadowed me. I did not dream
The sun would never look o'er them and gleam,
Save at the earliest hour. So all the day
One half my garden under twilight lay.
Another soul had overlooked the shade:
I found the boundaries of a bed he made
For tulips. Well, I had a fresher trust
And spent my heart upon this sterile dust.
What thing will grow where never the sun shines?
Vainly I planted flowering stalks and vines.
What years to learn the soil! Why, even weeds
Look green and fresh. But if one concedes
Salvia will flourish not, nor palest phlox,
One might have hope left for a row of box.

Why is it that some silent places thrill
With elfin comradeship, and others fill
The heart with sickening loneliness? My breast
Seems hollow for great emptiness, unrest
Casting my eyes about my garden where
I still must live, breathing its lifeless air.
Why should I have a garden anyway?
I have so many friends who pass the day
In streets or squares, or little barren courts,
I fancy there are gardens of all sorts,
Far worse than mine. And who has this delight:
There's my syringa with its blooms of white!
It flourishes in my garden! In this brief
Season of blossoms and unfolding leaf

What if I like my garden not but love
The oak tree and the lilac tree thereof,
And hide my face, lest one my rapture guess,
Amid the white syringa's loveliness?

THE LOOM

My brother, the god, and I grow sick
Of heaven's heights.
We plunge to the valley to hear the tick
Of days and nights.
We walk and loiter around the Loom
To see, if we may,
The Hand that smashes the beam in the gloom
To the shuttle's play;
Who grows the wool, who cards and spins,
Who clips and ties;
For the storied weave of the Gobelins,
Who draughts and dyes.

But whether you stand or walk around
You shall but hear
A murmuring life, as it were the sound
Of bees or a sphere.
No Hand is seen, but still you may feel
A pulse in the thread,
And thought in every lever and wheel
Where the shuttle sped,
Dripping the colors, as crushed and urged—
Is it cochineal?—
Shot from the shuttle, woven and merged
A tale to reveal.
Woven and wound in a bolt and dried
As it were a plan.
Closer I looked at the thread and cried:
The thread is man!

Then my brother, curious, strong and bold,
Tugged hard at the bolt

Of the woven life; for a length unrolled
The cryptic cloth.
He gasped for labor, blind for the moult
Of the up-winged moth.
While I saw a growth and a mad crusade
That the Loom had made;
Land and water and living things,
Till I grew afraid
For mouths and claws and devil wings,
And fangs and stings,
And tiger faces with eyes of hell
In caves and holes.
And eyes in terror and terrible
For awakened souls.

I stood above my brother, the god
Unwinding the roll.
And a tale came forth of the woven slain
Sequent and whole,
Of flint and bronze, trowel and hod,
The wheel and the plane,
The carven stone and the graven clod
Painted and baked.
And cromlechs, proving the human heart
Has always ached;
Till it puffed with blood and gave to art
The dream of the dome;
Till it broke and the blood shot up like fire
In tower and spire.

And here was the Persian, Jew and Goth
In the weave of the cloth;
Greek and Roman, Ghibelline, Guelph,
Angel and elf.
They were dyed in blood, tangled in dreams
Like a comet's streams.
And here were surfaces red and rough
In the finished stuff,
Where the knotted thread was proud and rebelled
As the shuttle proved

BOMBYX

The fated warp and woof that held
When the shuttle moved;
And pressed the dye which ran to loss
In a deep maroon
Around an altar, oracle, cross
Or a crescent moon.
Around a face, a thought, a star
In a riot of war!
Then I said to my brother, the god, let be,
Though the thread be crushed,
And the living things in the tapestry
Be woven and hushed;
The Loom has a tale, you can see, to tell,
And a tale has told.
I love this Gobelin epical
Of scarlet and gold.
If the heart of a god may look with pride
At the wondrous weave,
It is something better to Hands which guide—
I see and believe.

BOMBYX

Sealed in a cocoon-cradle of white silk,
Locked fast in sleep;
Or bound for years as a chrysalid, while the neap
Creative tides rise to the spring and slough
The torn strands and the golden pupa stuff,
You tear wings free for the connubial flight—
Break suddenly the embryo trance, drift off,
Whole troops of you in a looped and colorful clutter
Wobbling like leaves in a fresh wind's delight.
And over clover meadows in a flutter,
Or through sweet scented hollows,
You seek the expectant mate,
And the mad moment where life turns to death,
And both become one essence and one breath,
One undivided fate.

Together you fly
Drunken with life, yet mad to die,
Since soul achievement is death after all,
All rivals for the wedding festival.
Yet only one of you can win the prize;
The rest shall sink exhausted in defeat,
While the triumphant bridegroom dies
In his own rapture and creative fire—
All perish in the flame of their desire.
For none of you is given strength to live
Beyond the quest, or the hymeneal kiss.
The disappointed perish;
One wins his joy, but may not keep or cherish
The moment which contains it, sudden doom
Falls on the winner of his bliss,
And on the wings that quiver their frustration.

Bombyx! to have more life than is enough
To win the mate, achieve the one success,
And on that life to mount and half survey
The universe—
Build cities with it, letter precious scrolls,
Plan for the race to be and have the vision,
To labor for, of ages half elysian,
Is that a benediction or a curse?
Is it a good or evil to have strength
To soar beyond the sun, or planets even
If none of us at length
Reach heaven?
If none of our infatuate souls
Sip the bright fire of God?
If it be all a flying in a dream,
A lying down at last in deeper night,
To enrich the prodigal sod,
To breed new wings
For the same flight?

NEL MEZZO DEL CAMMIN

You call this a world! Cloud cuckoo town,
Nephelo coccygia, warp and woof,
Now at the last I write it down,
Since I no longer have the proof
To show it isn't opera bouffe,
A moving picture film and screen;
Stage world, with the glue between
The angels' feathers, the devil's hoof
Neither violent nor venene.

Eheu! The middle of the way too—
Gethsemane and left in the lurch.
Storms frowning up the dying day too,
Bending a weed that was a birch.
I can step right over the tallest church.
Trumpets have shrunk to trumpet toys,
Tottle-te-toot! I hear the clocks
Ticking in paper breasts. What noise!
Gorges and towering rocks
Are just the canvas He employs,
With gelatine rivers and candy lochs,
Shored in with painted blocks.

I passed through a jungle where smoky mosses
Hung from the trees, the crocodile
Slept or clambered about the fosses;
Buzzards roosting, not very vile;
Rivers of red ink shed for crosses.
Centaurs with arrows, file on file,
Drew and shouted: he seems to smile
Let's make him weep a while.

Look out for the lion! Said I, with a scowl,
Let the lion growl:
Cat-gut scraped in the painted wings.
Does the terrible tiger howl:
Tin cans and resined strings.
Do the dead gibber and does the owl

Hoot where the shroud is slipping, clings?
Who pressed the squeaky springs
In the death bird that it sings?

And you, sir! Well, one time I was sure
You carried a poisoned dart!
And now you're empty space as pure
As the sky when clouds are blown apart.
Ether! Radium! Nothing! A cure
For grit and dust which start
Grief in this Waterbury heart.

For I had trod the cobra, found
He is but calico, cotton stuffed.
The boa chased me round and round;
Hyenas tracked me, licked and snuffed,
And made my poor heart flutter and pound,
Until I saw the mirror is all,
And the wood became a rare-bit dream
With monstrous faces and figures packed.
And then you ask: Is the mirror cracked,
Or is it so bright that it casts a beam
Through all the shadow scheme?

One time I saw a river's bank
Shaved down with spades as sheer as a wall,
Wasp holes, ant holes cut in two
Brought these molds of earth to view.
I turned away where the air was blank
And here was a thing fantastical:
Space was cored like a honeycomb
With forms of things that crawl and roam,
Animals, men. As I am alive,
I saw the form of a horse and cow
Edged with air and hollow as space.
But a horse and cow began to thrive
In just a second, a drifting mist
Flowed into the molds before my face.
And the animals moved, I don't know how,
Out of all the surrounding mesh,
Creatures of bone and flesh!

And it was just the same with men. I vow
I saw an astral stuff poured in
Pockets of air and men became
Voices talking of good and evil,
Virtue, courage, vice and sin,
God and the devil.

For the all unfolding Air is what?
The Great Idea, if so I may say,
A sort of Ocean leaping to waves.
And what do you care if they pass away?
They sink to their source, not into graves.
Beasts may vanish, races decay,
The Ocean will always remain the same;
With new waves rising, no two alike;
Waves that are little and waves that rise
In storms and touch the skies.

R. Browning, you were a man of power,
But I don't think much of your tower.
And I see no use of blowing a horn,
The tower is merely papier-maché,
And comes no higher than to my knees.
I step right over it—pick a flower,
Purple, it may be, called heart's-ease
And go with the way of the seas.

For I am an optimist better than you:
This dream is hell, but it's all to the good:
The Ocean is water in calm or flood.
There's nothing wrecked, or wrongly wrought,
There's nothing real but Thought!

THE IDIOT

Two children in a garden
Shouting for joy
Were playing dolls and houses,
A girl and boy.

I smiled at a neighbor window,
And watched them play
Under a budding oak tree
On a wintry day.

And then a board half broken
In the high board fence
Fell over and there entered,
I know not whence,
A jailbird face of yellow
With a vacant sulk,
His body was a sickly
Thing of bulk.

His open mouth was slavering,
And a green light
Turned disc-like in his eyeballs,
Like a dog's at night.
His teeth were like a giant's,
And far apart;
I saw him reel on the children
With a stopping heart.
He trampled their dolls and ruined
The house they made;
He struck to earth the children
With a dirty spade.
As a tiger growls with an antelope
After the hunt,
Over the little faces
I heard him grunt.

I stood at the window frozen,
And short of breath,
And then I saw the idiot
Was Master Death!

A bird in the lilac bushes
Began to sing.
The garden colored before me
To the kiss of spring.

And the yellow face in a moment
Was a mystic white;
The matted hair was softened
To starry light.
The ragged coat flowed downward
Into a robe;
He carried a sword and a balance
And stood on a globe.
I watched him from the window
Under a spell;
The idiot was the angel
Azrael!

THE STAR

I am a certain god
Who slipped down from a remote height
To a place of pools and stars.
And I sat invisible
Amid a clump of trees
To watch the madmen.

There were cries and groans about me,
And shouts of laughter and curses.
Figures passed by with self-absorbed contempt,
Wrinkling in bitter smiles about their lips.
Others hurried on with set eyes,
Pursuing something.
Then I said this is the place for mad Frederick—
Mad Frederick will be here.

But everywhere I could see
Figures sitting or standing
By little pools.
Some seemed grown into the soil
And were helpless.
And of these some were asleep.
Others laughed the laughter
That comes from dying men

Trying to face Death.
And others said "I should be content,"
And others said "I will fly."
Whereupon sepulchral voices muttered,
As of creatures sitting or hanging head down
From limbs of the trees,
"We will not let you."
And others looked in their pools
And clasped hands and said, "Gone, all gone."
By other pools there were dead bodies:
Some of youth, some of age.
They had given up the fight,
They had drunk poisoned water,
They had searched
Until they fell—
All had gone mad!

Then I, a certain god,
Curious to know
What it is in pools and stars
That drives men and women
Over the earth in this quest,
Waited for mad Frederick.
And then I heard his step.

I knew that long ago
He sat by one of these pools
Enraptured of a star's image.
And that hands, for his own good,
As they said,
Dumped clay into the pool
And blotted his star.
And I knew that after that
He had said, "They will never spy again
Upon my ecstasy.
They will never see me watching one star.
I will fly by rivers,
And by little brooks,
And by the edge of lakes,
And by little bends of water,

Where no wind blows,
And glance at stars as I pass.
They will never spy again
Upon my ecstasy."

And I knew that mad Frederick
In this flight
Through years of restless and madness
Was caught by the image of a star
In a mere beyond a meadow
Down from a hill, under a forest,
And had said,
"No one sees;
Here I can find life,
Through vision of eternal things."
But they had followed him.
They stood on the brow of the hill,
And when they saw him gazing in the water
They rolled a great stone down the hill,
And shattered the star's image.
Then mad Frederick fled with laughter.
It echoed through the wood.
And he said, "I will look for moons,
I will punish them who disturb me,
By worshiping moons."
But when he sought moons
They left him alone,
And he did not want the moons.
And he was alone, and sick from the moons,
And covered as with a white blankness,
Which was the worst madness of all.

And I, a certain god,
Waiting for mad Frederick
To enter this place of pools and stars,
Saw him at last.
With a sigh he looked about upon his fellows
Sitting or standing by their pools.
And some of the pools were covered with scum,
And some were grown with weeds,

And some were congealed as of the north wind,
And a few were yet pure,
And held the star's image.
And by these some sat and were glad,
Others had lost the vision.
The star was there, but its meaning vanished.
And mad Frederick, going here and there,
With no purpose,
Only curious and interested
As I was, a certain god,
Came by a certain pool
And saw a star.

He shivered,
He clasped his hands,
He sank to his knees,
He touched his lips to the water.

Then voices from the limbs of the trees muttered:
"There he is again."
"He must be driven away."
"The pool is not his."
"He does not belong here."
So as when bats fly in a cave
They swooped from their hidings in the trees
And dashed themselves in the pool.
Then I saw what these flying things were—
But no matter.
They were illusions, evil and envious
And dull,
But with power to destroy.
And mad Frederick turned away from the pool
And covered his eyes with his arms.
Then a certain god,
Of less power than mine,
Came and sat beside me and said:
"Why do you allow this to be?
They are all seeking,
Why do you not let them find their heart's delight?
Why do you allow this to be?"

But I did not answer.
The lesser god did not know
That I have no power,
That only the God has the power.
And that this must be
In spite of all lesser gods.

And I saw mad Frederick
Arise and ascend to the top of a high hill,
And I saw him find the star
Whose image he had seen in the pool.
Then he knelt and prayed:
"Give me to understand, O Star,
Your inner self, your eternal spirit,
That I may have you and not images of you,
So that I may know what has driven me through the world,
And may cure my soul.
For I know you are Eternal Love,
And I can never escape you.
And if I cannot escape you,
Then I must serve you.
And if I must serve you,
It must be to good and not ill.
You have brought me from the forest of pools
And the images of stars,
Here to the hill's top.
Where now do I go?
And what shall I do?"

SILENCE

I have known the silence of the stars and of the sea,
And the silence of the city when it pauses,
And the silence of a man and a maid,
And the silence for which music alone finds the word,
And the silence of the woods before the winds of spring begin,
And the silence of the sick
When their eyes roam about the room.

And I ask: For the depths
Of what use is language?
A beast of the field moans a few times
When death takes its young:
And we are voiceless in the presence of realities—
We cannot speak.

A curious boy asks an old soldier
Sitting in front of the grocery store,
"How did you lose your leg?"
And the old soldier is struck with silence,
Or his mind flies away,
Because he cannot concentrate it on Gettysburg.
It comes back jocosely
And he says, "A bear bit it off."
And the boy wonders, while the old soldier
Dumbly, feebly, lives over
The flashes of guns, the thunder of cannon,
The shrieks of the slain,
And himself lying on the ground,
And the hospital surgeons, the knives,
And the long days in bed.
But if he could describe it all
He would be an artist.
But if he were an artist there would be deeper wounds
Which he could not describe.

There is the silence of a great hatred,
And the silence of a great love,
And the silence of a deep peace of mind,
And the silence of an embittered friendship.
There is the silence of a spiritual crisis,
Through which your soul, exquisitely tortured,
Comes with visions not to be uttered
Into a realm of higher life.
And the silence of the gods who understand each other without speech.
There is the silence of defeat.
There is the silence of those unjustly punished;
And the silence of the dying whose hand

Suddenly grips yours.
There is the silence between father and son,
When the father cannot explain his life,
Even though he be misunderstood for it.

There is the silence that comes between husband and wife.
There is the silence of those who have failed;
And the vast silence that covers
Broken nations and vanquished leaders.
There is the silence of Lincoln,
Thinking of the poverty of his youth.
And the silence of Napoleon
After Waterloo.
And the silence of Jeanne d'Arc
Saying amid the flames, "Blessed Jesus"—
Revealing in two words of sorrow, all hope.
And there is the silence of age,
Too full of wisdom for the tongue to utter it
In words intelligible to those who have not lived
The great range of life.

And there is the silence of the dead.
If we who are in life cannot speak
Of profound experiences,
Why do you marvel that the dead
Do not tell you of death?
Their silence shall be interpreted
As we approach them.

WORLDS

I have known or seen all the worlds of this world,
And some of the worlds of the world to come;
And I say to you that every world lives to itself.
And is known to itself alone,
Though it moves among the other worlds of this world.

I was in a hospital and given up to die—
And that is one of the worlds.

I had turned blue,
And they moved me to the charity ward of the dying—
And that is one of the worlds.
They had screens around us,
So that we could not see each other die.
But they had no way to shut out from each of us
The cries and prayers of the others.
Next me was a little woman they called butterball—
She was yellow from cancer,
And had been cut to death by the surgeons.
She cried all night, she died at dawn
Just as I began to mend.

There is the world of the internes making love to the nurses.
And the world of the surgeons hurrying to dinners,
And the applause of learned societies.
And the world of their children at school, or in play,
Ignorant of what it means to be learned and notable,
And to be the children of such men.
There is the world of the policeman
Who walks by the hospital at night.
And the world of the taxi drivers
Who never see the hospital as they rush past.
There is the world of the man and woman in the taxi,
Kissing each other in anticipation of the place of assignation.
There is the world of the train crew
Who make up the limited back of the hospital;
And the world of travelers, happy or anxious,
Going or coming.
And this day there was for myself
The world of getting well,
With its meaning and its happiness
Unguessed by the world of the well.
And my eyes were opened to the worlds
By suffering, and coming from that world
Of the charity ward of the dying.
And I saw that there is the world of a merchant;
And the world of a judge;
And the world of a legislator, or a president;
And the world of a rich man;

And the world of a poor man;
And the world of a defeated man;
And the world of a victorious man;
And the world of a ruling nation;
And the world of a people who are ruled;
And the world of a servant, a laborer;
And the world of a master, and a user;
And the world of passion;
And the world of love;
And the world of envy;
And the world of hate;
And the world of strife;
And the world of convicts,
And those condemned to death.
And the world of war and warriors;
And the world of the young;
And the world of the old;
And the world of desire unceasing;
And the world of desire that is dead;
And the world of those who see God,
And the world of those who see Him not;
And the world of the faithful, the hopeful;
And the world of the doubters and the hopeless.
And the world of those who have loneliness forever;
And the world of those who ease loneliness
With futile activity;
And the world of those who seek truth and find it not;
And the world of those who never give up
In the search for beauty.
And the world of those to whom the world is harmonious sound.
And the world of those to whom the world is atoms or stars.
And the world of those to whom the world is a machine;
And the world of those to whom the world is life.
And the world of those to whom the world is an infinite mass
To be carved as the will wills;
And the world of those to whom the world is chaos;
And the world of those to whom the world is memory;
And the world of those to whom the world is regret;
And the world of those entangled in subtle horrors;

And eaten minute by minute by thoughts that die not;
And the world of those who front and touch
The mystery of closing and suffocating horizons,
And the beleaguering Infinite
With brows of sentinel and armèd thought,
Standing at the heights and the Thermopylae of life,
Even to the hour of surprise from the plains
By Death, the Persian. . . .

And I saw that every soul is a world to itself,
Making its own murmurous music night and day,
And having its realest world in itself,
And knowing none of the other worlds.

And what worlds beyond our world
Know our world of worlds?
All worlds of this world, and all worlds,
May be but the world of the mind of God,
Of which he is not conscious Himself,
Unless He chooses to think of them.

THE ROOM OF MIRRORS

I saw a room where many feet were dancing.
The ceiling and the wall were mirrors, glancing
Both flames of candles and the heaven's light,
Though windows there were none for air or flight.
The room was in a form polygonal,
Reached by a little door and narrow hall.
One could behold them enter for the dance,
And waken as it were out of a trance,
And either singly or with some one whirl:
The old, the young, full livers, boy and girl.
And every panel of the room was just
A mirrored door through which a hand was thrust
Here, there, around the room, a soul to seize
Whereat a scream would rise, but no surcease
Of music or of dancing, save by him
Drawn through the mirrored panel to the dim

And unknown space behind the flashing mirrors,
And by his partner struck through by the terrors
Of sudden loss.

And looking I could see
That scarcely any dancer here could free
His eyes from off the mirrors, but would gaze
Upon himself or others, till a craze
Shone in his eyes thus to anticipate
The hand that took each dancer soon or late.
Some analyzed themselves, some only glanced,
Some stared and paled and then more madly danced.
One dancer only never looked at all.
He seemed soul-captured by the carnival.
There were so many dancers there he loved,
He was so greatly by the music moved,
He had no time to study his own face
There in the mirrors as from place to place
He quickly danced.

Until I saw at last
This dancer by the whirling dancers cast
Face full against a mirrored panel, where
Before he could look at himself or stare,
He plunged through to the other side—and quick,
As water closes when you lift the stick,
The mirrored panel swung in place and left
No trace of him, as 'twere a magic trick.
But all his partners thus so soon bereft
Went dancing to the music as before.
But I saw faces in that mirrored door
Anatomizing their forced smiles and watching
Their faces over shoulders, even matching
Their terror with each other's to repress
A growing fear in seeing it was less
Than some one else's, or to ease despair
By looking in a face who did not care,
While watching for the hand that through some door
Caught a poor dancer from the dancing floor
With every time-beat of the orchestra.
What is this room of mirrors? Who can say?

THE LANDSCAPE

You and your landscape! There it lies
Stripped, resuming its disguise,
Clothed in dreams, made bare again,
Symbol infinite of pain,
Rapture, magic, mystery
Of vanished days and days to be.
There's its sea of tidal grass
Over which the south winds pass,
And the sunset's Tuscan gold
Which the distant windows hold
For an instant like a sphere
Bursting ere it disappear.
There's the dark green woods which throve
In the spell of Leese's Grove.
And the winding of the road;
And the hill o'er which the sky
Stretched its pallid vacancy
Ere the dawn or evening glowed.
And the wonder of the town
Somewhere from the hilltop down
Nestling under hills and woods
And the meadow's solitudes.

And your paper knight of old
Secrets of the landscape told.
And the hedgerows where the pond
Took the blue of heavens beyond
The hastening clouds of gusty March.
There you saw their wrinkled arch
Where the east wind cracks his whips
Round the little pond and clips
Mainsails from your toppled ships. . . .

Landscape that in youth you knew
Past and present, earth and you!
All the legends and the tales
Of the uplands, of the vales;

Sounds of cattle and the cries
Of plowmen and of travelers
Were its soul's interpreters.
And here the lame were always lame.
Always gray the gray of head.
And the dead were always dead,
Ere the landscape had become
Your cradle, as it was their tomb.

And when the thunder storms would waken
Of the dream your soul was not forsaken:
In the room where the dormer windows look—
There were your knight and the tattered book.
With colors of the forest green
Gabled roofs and the demesne
Of faery kingdoms and faery time
Storied in pre-natal rhyme. . . .
Past the orchards, in the plain
The cattle fed on in the rain.
And the storm-beaten horseman sped
Rain blinded and with bended head.
And John the plowman comes and goes
In labor wet, with steaming clothes.
This is your landscape, but you see
Not terror and not destiny
Behind its loved, maternal face,
Its power to change, or fade, replace
Its wonder with a deeper dream,
Unfolding to a vaster theme.
From time eternal was this earth?
No less this landscape with your birth
Arose, nor leaves you, nor decay
Finds till the twilight of your day.
It bore you, molds you to its plan.
It ends with you as it began,
But bears the seed of future years,
Of higher raptures, dumber tears.

For soon you lose the landscape through
Absence, sorrow, eyes grown true

To the naked limbs which show
Buds that never more may blow.
Now you know the lame were straight
Ere you knew them, and the fate
Of the old is yet to die.
Now you know the dead who lie
In the graves you saw where first
The landscape on your vision burst,
Were not always dead, and now
Shadows rest upon the brow
Of the souls as young as you.
Some are gone, though years are few
Since you roamed with them the hills.
So the landscape changes, wills
All the changes, did it try
Its promises to justify? . . .

For you return and find it bare:
There is no heaven of golden air.
Your eyes around the horizon rove,
A clump of trees is Leese's Grove.
And what's the hedgerow, what's the pond?
A wallow where the vagabond
Beast will not drink, and where the arch
Of heaven in the days of March
Refrains to look. A blinding rain
Beats the once gilded window pane.
John, the poor wretch, is gone, but bread
Tempts other feet that path to tread
Between the barn and house, and brave
The March rain and the winds that rave. . . .
O landscape, I am one who stands
Returned with pale and broken hands
Glad for the day that I have known,
And finds the deserted doorway strown
With shoulder blade and spinal bone.
And you who nourished me and bred,
I find the spirit from you fled.
You gave me dreams, 'twas at your breast
My soul's beginning rose and pressed

My steps afar at last and shaped
A world elusive, which escaped
Whatever love or thought could find
Beyond the tireless wings of mind.
Yet grown by you, and feeding on
Your strength as mother, you are gone
When I return from living, trace
My steps to see how I began,
And deeply search your mother face
To know your inner self, the place
For which you bore me, sent me forth
To wander, south or east or north. . . .
Now the familiar landscape lies
With breathless breast and hollow eyes.
It knows me not, as I know not
Its secret, spirit; all forgot
Its kindred look is, as I stand
A stranger in an unknown land.

Are we not earth-born, formed of dust
Which seeks again its love and trust
In an old landscape, after change
In hearts grown weary, wrecked and strange?
What though we struggled to emerge
Dividual, footed for the urge
Of further self-discoveries, though
In the mid-years we cease to know,
Through disenchanted eyes, the spell
That clothed it like a miracle—
Yet at the last our steps return
Its deeper mysteries to learn.
It has been always us, it must
Clasp to itself our kindred dust.
We cannot free ourselves from it.
Near or afar we must submit
To what is in us, what was grown
Out of the landscape's soil, the known
And unknown powers of soil and soul.
As bodies yield to the control
Of the earth's center, and so bend

In age, so hearts toward the end
Bend down with lips so long athirst
To waters which were known at first—
The little spring at Leese's Grove
Was your first love, is your last love!

When those we knew in youth have crept
Under the landscape, which has kept
Nothing we saw with youthful eyes;
Ere God is formed in the empty skies,
I wonder not our steps are pressed
Toward the mystery of their rest.
That is the hope at bud which kneels
Where ancestors the tomb conceals.
Age no less than youth would lean
Upon some love. For what is seen
No more of father, mother, friend,
For hands of flesh lost, eyes grown blind
In death, a something which assures,
Comforts, allays our fears, endures.
Just as the landscape and our home
In childhood made of heaven's dome,
And all the farthest ways of earth
A place as sheltered as the hearth.

Is it not written at the last day
Heaven and earth shall roll away?
Yes, as my landscape passed through death,
Lay like a corpse, and with new breath
Became instinct with fire and light—
So shall it roll up in my sight,
Pass from the realm of finite sense,
Become a thing of spirit, whence
I shall pass too, its child in faith
Of dreams it gave me, which nor death
Nor change can wreck, but still reveal
In change a Something vast, more real
Than sunsets, meadows, greenwood trees,
Or even faery presences.
A Something which the earth and air

Transmutes but keeps them what they were;
Clear films of beauty grown more thin
As we approach and enter in.
Until we reach the scene that made
Our landscape just a thing of shade.

THE FOLDING MIRROR

A folding mirror! What may it be?
Nothing? Or something? Let me see!
Its silver chain is hung to the sky
On a planet nail. And it fronts my eye.
No stars reflect themselves at first,
The mirrors are dustless, vacant and clean.
Not even my face shows—am I cursed?
What may the mirrors mean?

I watch like a cat that waits to mangle
A breathless rat in an alley nook.
And a little figure steps into the angle
Made by the folding mirrors. Look!
His thin legs wobble, bend and dangle
Like radish roots. He takes the crook
Out of his arms and raises them up,
As if in panic, or supplication.
He bends and peers, whines like a pup,
Walks to and fro in his desperation,
Pinches his arms and beats his breast;
Runs quivering fingers between his hair,
Wavers for weariness, sighs for rest,
Looks up to the planet that seems to bear
The silver chain like a brad in the wall.
Upsprings, searches the mirrors again;
Sees for the first the prodigal
Waste of stars in the black inane.
Stamps with his feet upon the void
He stands on, paces on, why, he wonders
Is he upborne like an asteroid?
Hark! The limitless blackness thunders:

The Infinite growls, he whirls and shivers,
Runs to cover the mirrors to climb.
They yield like the waters of phantom rivers.
He acts like a soul new born that quivers
Before the mirrors of Space and Time.

Now what's to do? He must fill in.
This emptiness with horror is shod.
When did this pageant of things begin?
Somewhere hiding there is a God.
Some one drove that planet nail
Into the blue wall; some one hung
The silver chain. And what is the tale
Of the mirrors here in the blackness swung?
The soul is naked, weak and alone,
And sees its nakedness in the glass.
It must create from wood and stone,
Wire and reeds, color and brass.
It must create though it be but a mime,
Make a reality all its own
Before the mirror of white called Time,
Before the mirror of blue called Space.
Clasp the vastness between their folds,
Find laws, raise altars, dream of a face—
Make that real which the hope beholds.

Our terrored manikin commences,
Fattens his littleness with clothes.
With crowns and miters puffs his senses,
Crushes the grape to drown his woes.
Fills full the mirrors with faces. Now
They are dancing before them, age and youth,
Laurels or thorns are bound on a brow.
They hunt and slay for a thing called Truth.
Dig for treasure, toil for riches,
Struggle for place—it is well enough!
Some lift their busts into chosen niches.
All are hungry for peace and love.
And only a few are blind, dispute
The thing is a dream. If there be worth

It lies in the strings of the lyre or lute,
Sounds that never return to earth;
Dreams to seeing eyes reflected,
Caught from infinite realms afar.
How could they be seen, or recollected
Except for the Real—except for a Star?

God in the blackness, whirlwind, lightning,
God in the blinding fire of the sun,
Before these empty mirrors brightening
See what we do, what we have done!
Out of an astral substance molding
Music and laws for our hearts' control,
Yes, and a hope that the mirrors' folding
Lets slip through a growing soul.
Are You not proud of us, do You not pity?
Is all the glory Yours alone?
Then if it be, You must take the city
Builded, demolished stone from stone.
All of our madness, weariness, error
Blindness, weakness, pain and loss
Fumbling feebly before the mirror,
Yours is the crown, but Yours the cross!
Yours is the juice of grape or poppies
To fill the void with a make-believe;
Yours the hope where never a prop is,
The opiates, too, that dull, deceive,
No less than nature that lifts eternal
Vision of Life to quiet the heart:
Verse and color that stamp the infernal
Dragon of Fear with the feet of Art.
Yours and ours the consolations
In loneliness and in terror wrought
Out of our spirits' desolations,
Out of our spirits' love and thought!

BOTANICAL GARDENS

He follows me no more, I said, nor stands
Beside me. And I wake these later days
In an April mood, a wonder light and free.
The vision is gone, but gone the constant pain
Of constant thought. I see dawn from my hill,
And watch the lights which fingers from the waters
Twine from the sun or moon. Or look across
The waste of bays and marshes to the woods,
Under the prism colors of the air,
Held in a vacuum silence, where the clouds,
Like cyclop hoods are tossed against the sky
In terrible glory.

And earth-charmed I lie
Before the staring sphinx whose musing face
Is this Egyptian heaven, and whose eyes
Are separate clouds of gold, whose pedestal
Is earth, whose silken sheathèd claws
No longer toy with me, even while I stroke them:
Since I have ceased to tease her.

Then behold
A breeze is blown out of a world becalmed,
And as I see the multitudinous leaves
Fluttered against the water and the light,
And see this light unveil itself, reveal
An inner light, a Presence, Secret Splendor,
I clap hands over eyes, for the earth reels;
And I have fears of deities shown or spun
From nothingness. But when I look again
The earth has stayed itself, I see the lake,
The leaves, the light of the sun, the cyclop hoods
Of thunder heads, yet feel upon my arm
A hand I know, and hear a voice I know—
He has returned and brought with him the thought,
And the old pain.

The voice says: "Leave the sphinx.
The garden waits your study, fully grown."

And I arise and follow down a slope
To a lawn by the lake and an ancient seat of stone,
And near it a fountain's shattered rim enclosing
An Eros of light mood, whose sculptured smile
Consciously dimples for the unveiled pistil of love,
As he strokes with baby hand the slender arching
Neck of a swan. And here is a peristyle
Whose carven columns are pink as the long, updrawn
Stalks of tulips bedded in April snow.
And sunk amid tiger lilies is the face
Of an Asian Aphrodite close to the seat
With feet of a Babylonian lion amid
This ruined garden of yellow daisies, poppies
And ruddy asphodel from Crete, it seems.
Though here is our western moon as white and thin
As an abalone shell hung under the boughs
Of an oak, that is mocked by the vastness of sky between
His boughs and the moon in this sky of afternoon. . . .
We walk to the water's edge and here he shows me
Green scum, or stalks, or sedges, grasses, shrubs,
That yield to trees beyond the levels, where
The beech and oak have triumph; for along
This gradual growth from algæ, reeds and grasses,
That builds the soil against the water's hands,
All things are fierce for place and garner life
From weaker things.

And then he shows me root stocks,
And Alpine willow, growths that sneak and crawl
Beneath the soil. Or as we leave the lake
And walk the forest I behold lianas,
Smilax or woodbine climbing round the trunks
Of giant trees that live and out of earth,
And out of air make strength and food and ask
No other help. And in this place I see
Spiral bryony, python of the vines,

That coils and crushes; and that banyan tree
Whose spreading branches drop new roots to earth,
And live afar from where the parent trunk
Has sunk its roots, so that the healthful sun
Is darkened: as a people might be darkened
By ignorance or want or tyranny,
Or dogma of a jungle-hidden faith.
Why is it, think I, though I dare not speak,
That this should be to forests or to men;
That water fails, and light decreases, heat
Of God's air lessens, and the soil goes spent,
Till plants change leaves and stalks and seeds as well,
Or migrate from the olden places, go
In search of life, or if they cannot move
Die in the ruthless marches.

That is life, he said.
For even these, the giants scatter life
Into the maws of death. That towering tree
That for these hundred years has leafed itself,
And through its leaves out of the magic air
Drawn nutriment for annual girths, took root
Out of an acorn which good chance preserved,
While all its brother acorns, cast to earth
To make trees by a parent tree now gone,
Were crushed, devoured, or strangled as they sprouted
Amid thick jealous growth wherein they fell.
All acorns but this one were lost.

Then he reads
My questioning thought and shows me yuccas, cactus
Whose thick leaves in the rainless places thrive.
And shows me leaves that must have rain, and roots
That must have water where the river flows.
And how the spirit of life, though turned or driven
This way or that beyond a course begun,
Cannot be stayed or quenched, but moves, conforms
To soil and sun, makes roots, or thickens leaves,
Or thins or readjusts them on the stem
To fashion forth itself, produce its kind.

Nor dies not, rests not, nor surrenders not,
Is only changed or buried, reappears
As other forms of life.

We had walked through
A forest of sequoias, beeches, pines,
And ancient oaks, where I could see the trace
Of willows, alders, ruined or devoured
By the great Titans.

At last
We reached my hill and sat and overlooked
The garden at our feet, even to the place
Of tiger lilies and of asphodel,
By now beneath the self-same moon, grown denser:
As where the wounded surface of the shell
Thickens its shimmering stuff in spiral coigns
Of the shell, so was the moon above the seat
Beside the Eros and the Aphrodite
Sunk amid yellow daisies and deep grass.
And here we sat and looked. And here my vision
Was over all we saw, but not a part
Of what we saw, for all we saw stood forth
As foreign to myself as something touched
To learn the thing it is.

I might have asked
Who owns this garden, for the thought arose
With my surprise, who owns this garden, who
Planted this garden, why and to what end,
And why this fight for place, for soil and sun,
Water and air, and why this enmity
Between the things here planted, and between
Flying or crawling life and plants, and whence
The power that falls in one place but arises
Some other place; and why the unceasing growth
Of all these forms that only come to seed,
Then disappear to enrich the insatiate soil,
Where the new seed falls? But silence kept me there
For wonder of the beauty which I saw,

Even while the faculty of external vision
Kept clear the garden separate from me,
Envisioned, seen as grasses, sedges, alders,
As forestry, as fields of wheat and corn,
As the vast theatre of unceasing life,
Moving to life and blind to all but life;
As places used, tried out, as if the gardener,
For his delight or use, or for an end
Of good or beauty made experiments
With seed or soils or crossings of the seed.
Even as peoples, epochs, did the garden
Lie to my vision, or as races crowding,
Absorbing, dispossessing, killing races,
Not only for a place to grow, but under
A stimulus of doctrine: as Mahomet,
Or Jesus, like a vital change of air,
Or artifice of culture, made the garden,
Which mortals call the world, grow in a way,
And overgrow the world as neither dreamed.
Who is the Gardener then? Or is there one
Beside the life within the plant, within
The python climbers, wandering sedges, root stalks,
Thorn bushes, nightshade, deadly saprophytes,
Goths, Vandals, Tartars, striving for more life,
And praying to the urge within as God,
The Gardener who lays out the garden, sprays
For insects which devour, keeps rich the soil
For those who pray and know the Gardener
As One who is without and oversees? . . .

But while in contemplation of the garden,
Whether from failing day or from departure
Of my own vision in the things it saw,
Bereft of penetrating thought, I sank,
Became a part of what I saw, and lost
The great solution.

As we sat in silence,
And coming night, what seemed the sinking moon,
Amid the yellow sedges by the lake

Began to twinkle, as a fire were blown—
And it was fire, the garden was afire,
As it were all the world had flamed with war.
And a wind came out of the bright heaven
And blew the flames, first through the ruined garden,
Then through the wood, the fields of wheat, at last
Nothing was left but waste and wreaths of smoke
Twisting toward the stars. And there he sat
Nor uttered aught, save when I sighed he said:
"If it be comforting I promise you
Another spring shall come."

"And after that?"
"Another spring—that's all I know myself,
There shall be springs and springs!"

DESOLATE SCYTHIA

Χθονὸς μεν ἐς τηλουρὸν ἥκομεν πεδον.— Aes.

When there are no distances in music,
No far off things suggested of faery forests or celestial heights;
When nothing undiscovered stands back of the written page,
And the landscape contains nothing hidden,
And no alluring spirits of further places;
When no more in eyes shines the light of mystery,
And the thrill of discovered kinships
Has fallen into the familiar recognition
That takes all men and women
As daily associates of an accustomed world,
Then you have come to the uttermost plain of earth
Where lie the rocks of desolate Scythia.

THE SEARCH

When the hills grow green at midway time,
And bronze buds toss in the lane,
It is sweet to follow the river swallow
Where the tiles are red from rain.

When the slanting wind shakes apple blossoms,
And the willow trees are bowed,
The balcony banners flutter up
Where sails the hilltop cloud.

The balcony banners are ever the same
Wherever the heart may stray;
One sports the tiger and one the dragon
Whether you weep or play.

Where Little Boy Blue and the Knave of Hearts
And the Goose Girl dance on the green;
Where Knights in red and gold ride forth
Guarding the King and Queen;

Where the glint of swords is the only light
On a passing storm of men;
Or where the Furies rocking wait
For the world to die again;

Where horsemen ride by the winding river
Galloping in the quest:
One wears black and one wears yellow,
And one in red is dressed.

One fares in the flaunt of a scholar's cloak,
And a velvet hat and plume;
Two ride with eyes fixed on the ground,
And one with a face of gloom.

One laughs at the others and laughs at himself,
Two think of themselves alone;
One sees a goal for his thirsting soul,
And life as a stepping stone.

They pass through a village where
Some boys are flying kites.
The people come with food and wine
To entertain the Knights,

And one takes bread and one takes cake,
Three drink a little wine.
And two drink for their heart's delight,
And one for an anodyne.

And the Knight in red slips off to a tavern
And drinks him deep and strong,
And then he hurries to catch his fellows
And hails them with a song.

They come to a village that lay
Within a King's domains.
The Knight in yellow takes his sword
And strikes away the chains.

They come to a place of festival
Through which there passed a hearse:
The Knight in black reins in his steed
To look thereon and curse.

They come to a hall of curious books
Under a mountain peak:
The Knight in the scholar's cloak goes in
And talks with them in Greek.

And all the way by the winding river
By heaven's breeze unfurled
The tiger banner and dragon banner
Flutter around the world.

As night drew down they come to a palace
Of laughter, lights and din.
Says the Knight in red, "I tarry here,
For I hear the violin."

"Nay," says the Knight in yellow dressed;
"Nay," says the Knight in black;
"Nay," says the scholar, "I sleep in the open
To study the Zodiac."

Out comes to them an equerry
And sees their piteous dole:
"Come in," says the ruddy equerry,
"And dine with Old King Cole."

He seized their horses ere they could turn
And led them where candles shone,
And there with a crown tipped on his head
Sat the monarch on his throne.

"What is your name, all yellow dight,
And where does your sovereign reign?"
The sorrowful Knight then answered the King:
"I'm traveling back to Spain."

"What is your name, all dressed in black,
And whither do you roam?"
"I was a mad prince they sent to England
And now I'm going home."

"What is your name, in a scholar's cloak,
And what is your heart's joy?"
"I search through Europe night and day
For a spouse for Helen of Troy."

"They're as mad as hatters," said Old King Cole
As he straightened his crown on his head.
"Go call in the fiddlers, bring my bowl,
Fetch me my pipe," he said.

"But hold," said Cole, "who are you, fellow,
Now answer me fair and well?"
"I was born in France," said the Knight in red,
"And my name's Pantagruel."

"That's a good name," laughed Old King Cole.
"But whither are you bound?"
"I search for the Holy Bottle, King,
And I pray it may be found."

"That's a true answer," said Old King Cole,
"And here you shall abide;
Come up to my throne and reign forever,
And sit you by my side."

"Away with the rest," said Old King Cole,
"And fetch my bowl," said he.
"Here is Pantagruel found at last,
To keep me company."

From under the throne he drew the bottle
And poured wine into the bowl;
Pantagruel stepped to the dais
And drank with Old King Cole.

"Give yellow and black and scholar's cloak
A bed in the royal room."
But Old King Cole and Pantagruel
Drank till the morning's bloom.

They laughed and drank till the dawn was red,
While the sleepers prayed and wept.
They sang to the violins till day,
While black and yellow slept.

But Old King Cole, the merry old soul,
Was a curious soul as well:
"Who are these fellows," queried he
Of his friend Pantagruel.

"Well, never ask me," said Pantagruel,
"I met them down by the river;
But whether they came from the Land of Lanterns
They're traveling on forever."

They went to the room with a candle light
And looked in the face of the three—
"They're a sorry lot," said Old King Cole;
"They're a sorry lot," said he.

They held the candle to graybeard's face,
And graybeard moaned in his rest.
And pricked in color of India ink
Was a windmill on his breast.

The other muttered "Life is a shadow,"
And his face was young and pale:
And pricked on his arm was a green serpent
Devouring its own tail.

The other sighed: "I still must struggle
And strive until I die."
And over his heart was pricked the shape
Of a wingèd butterfly.

"What do I see?" said Old King Cole,
"Has the wine gone into my brain?
Who's Helen of Troy? Who'd leave England?
And who'd return to Spain?"

Pantagruel and Old King Cole
Slip down the stairs in stealth,
They fill the bowl from the Holy Bottle
And drink each other's health.

They stand at the window to watch the sun
And the mists of morning clear:
Three knights on horses climb the hill,
And silently disappear.

And yellow and black and scholar's cloak
Into the light have gone;
And the tiger banner and dragon banner
Flutter against the dawn.

"There's the dragon banner," said Old King Cole,
"And the tiger banner," he sighs.
Pantagruel breaks into a laugh,
As the monarch dries his eyes.

THE END OF THE SEARCH

"The tiger banyer, that is what you call much bad men in China, Amelica. The dragon banyer, that is storm, leprosy, no rice, what you call Nature. See! Nature!"—King Joy!

Said Old King Cole, "I know the banner
Of dragon and tiger too,
But I would know the vagrant fellows
Who came to my castle with you.

"And I would know why they rise in the moring
And never take bread or scrip;
And why they hasten over the mountain
In a sorrowed fellowship."

Then said Pantagruel: "Heard you not?
One said he goes to Spain.
One said he goes to Elsinore,
And one to the Trojan plain."

"Faith, if it be," said Old King Cole,
"There is a word that's more:
Who is it goes to Spain and Troy?
And who to Elsinore?"

"One may be Quixote," said Pantagruel,
"Out for the final joust.
"One may be Hamlet," said Pantagruel
And one I think is Faust.

"Whoever they be," said Pantagruel,
"Why stand at the window and drool?
Let's out and catch the runaways
While the morning hour is cool."

Pantagruel runs to the castle court,
And King Cole follows soon.
The cobblestones of the court yard ring
To the beat of their flying shoon.

Pantagruel clutches the Holy Bottle,
And King Cole clutches his crown.
They throw the bolt of the castle gate
And race them through the town.

They cross the river and follow the road,
They run by the willow trees,
And the tiger banner and dragon banner
Wait for the morning breeze.

They clamber the wall and part the brambles,
And tear through thicket and thorn.
And a wild dove in an olive tree
Does mourn and mourn and mourn.

A green snake starts in the tangled grass,
And springs his length at their feet.
And a condor circles the purple sky
Looking for carrion meat.

And mad black flies are over their heads,
And a wolf looks out of his hole.
Great drops of sweat break out and run
From the brow of Old King Cole.

Said Old King Cole: "A drink, my friend,
From the Holy Bottle, I pray,
My breath is short, my feet run blood,
My throat is baked as clay."

Anon they reach a mountain top,
And a mile below in the plain
Are the glitter of guns and a million men
Led by an idiot brain.

They come to a field of slush and flaw
Red with a blood-red dye.
And a million faces fungus pale
Stare horribly at the sky.

They come to a cross where a rotting thing
Is slipping down from the nails.
And a raven perched on the eyeless skull
Opens his beak and rails:

"If thou be the Son of man come down,
Save us and thyself save."
Pantagruel flings a rock at the raven:
"How now, blaspheming knave!"

"Come down and of my bottle drink,
And cease this scurvy rune."
But the raven flapped its wings and laughed
Loud as the water loon.

Said Old King Cole: "A drink, my friend,
I faint, a drink in haste."
But when he drinks he pales and mutters:
"The wine has lost its taste."

"You have gone mad," said Pantagruel,
"In faith 'tis the same old wine."
Pantagruel drinks at the holy bottle
But the flavor is like sea brine.

And there on a rock is a cypress tree
And a form with a muffled face.
"I know you, Death," said Pantagruel,
"But I ask of you no grace."

"Empty my bottle, sour my wine,
Bend me, you shall not break."
"Oh well," said Death, "one woe at a time
Before I come and take."

"You have lost everything in life but the bottle,
Youth and woman and friend.
Pass on and laugh for a little space yet
The laugh that has no end."

Pantagruel passes and looks around him,
Brave and merry of soul.
But there on the ground lies a dead body,
The body of Old King Cole.

And a Voice said: "Take the body up,
And carry the body for me
Until you come to a silent water,
By the sands of a silent sea."

Pantagruel takes the body up,
And the dead fat bends him down.
He climbs the mountains, runs the valleys
With body, bottle and crown.

And the wastes are strewn with skulls,
And the desert is hot and cursed.
And a phantom shape of the Holy Bottle
Mocks his burning thirst.

Pantagruel wanders seven days,
And seven nights wanders he.
And on the seventh night he rests him
By the sands of a silent sea.

And sees a new made fire on the shore,
And on the fire is a dish.
And by the fire two travelers sleep,
And two are broiling fish.

Don Quixote and Hamlet are sleeping,
And Faust is stirring the fire.
But the fourth is a stranger with a face
Starred with a great desire.

Pantagruel hungers, Pantagruel thirsts,
Pantagruel falls to his knees.
He flings down the body of Old King Cole
As a man throws off disease.

And rolls his burden away and cries:
"Take and watch, if you will.
But as for me I go to France
My bottle to refill.

"And as for me I go to France
To fill this bottle up."
He felt at his side for the Holy Bottle,
And found it turned a cup.

And the stranger said: "Behold our friend
Has brought my cup to me.
That is the cup whereof I drank
In the garden Gethsemane,

Pantagruel hands the cup to Jesus,
Who dips it in sea brine.
"This is the water," says Jesus of Nazareth,
"Whereof I make your wine."

And Faust takes the cup from Jesus of Nazareth,
And his lips wear a purple stain.
And Faust hands the cup to Pantagruel
With the dregs for him to drain.

Pantagruel drinks and falls into slumber,
And Jesus strokes his hair.
And Faust sings a song of Euphorion
To hide his heart's despair.

And Faust takes the hand of Jesus of Nazareth,
And they walk by the purple deep.
Says Jesus of Nazareth: "Some are watchers,
And some grow tired and sleep."

THE OLD AND THE NEW SPOON RIVER

THE HILL

Where are Elmer, Herman, Bert, Tom and Charley,
The weak of will, the strong of arm, the clown, the boozer, the fighter?
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

One passed in a fever,
One was burned in a mine,
One was killed in a brawl,
One died in a jail,
One fell from a bridge toiling for children and wife—
All, all, are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

Where are Ella, Kate, Mag, Lizzie and Edith,
The tender heart, the simple soul, the loud, the proud, the happy one?—
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

One died in shameful childbirth,
One of a thwarted love,
One at the hands of a brute in a brothel,
One of a broken pride, in the search for heart's desire,
One after life in far-away London and Paris
Was brought to her little space by Ella and Kate and Mag—
All, all, are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

Where are Uncle Isaac and Aunt Emily,
And old Towny Kincaid and Sevigne Houghton,
And Major Walker who had talked
With venerable men of the revolution?—
All, all, are sleeping on the hill.

They brought them dead sons from the war,
And daughters whom life had crushed,
And their children fatherless, crying—
All, all, are sleeping, sleeping, sleeping on the hill.

Where is Old Fiddler Jones
Who played with life all his ninety years,
Braving the sleet with bared breast,
Drinking, rioting, thinking neither of wife nor kin,
Nor gold, nor love, nor heaven?
Lo! he babbles of the fish-frys of long ago,
Of the horse races of long ago at Clary's Grove,
Of what Abe Lincoln said
One time at Springfield.

JONATHAN SWIFT SOMERS

After you have enriched your soul
To the highest point,
With books, thought, suffering, the understanding of many personalities,
The power to interpret glances, silences,
The pauses in momentous transformations,
The genius of divination and prophecy;
So that you feel able at times to hold the world
In the hollow of your hand;
Then, if, by the crowding of so many powers
Into the compass of your soul,
Your soul takes fire,
And in the conflagration of your soul
The evil of the world is lighted up and made clear—
Be thankful if in that hour of supreme vision
Life does not fiddle.

JEDUTHAN HAWLEY

There would be a knock at the door
And I would arise at midnight and go to the shop,
Where belated travelers would hear me hammering
Sepulchral boards and tacking satin.
And often I wondered who would go with me
To the distant land, our names the theme
For talk, in the same week, for I've observed

Two always go together.
Chase Henry was paired with Edith Conant;
And Jonathan Somers with Willie Metcalf;
And Editor Hamblin with Francis Turner,
When he prayed to live longer than Editor Whedon;
And Thomas Rhodes with widow McFarlane;
And Emily Sparks with Barry Holden;
And Oscar Hummel with Davis Matlock;
And Editor Whedon with Fiddler Jones;
And Faith Matheny with Dorcas Gustine.
And I, the solemnest man in town,
Stepped off with Daisy Fraser.

LUCINDA MATLOCK

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,
And played snap-out at Winchester.
One time we changed partners,
Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,
And then I found Davis.
We were married and lived together for seventy years,
Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children,
Eight of whom we lost
Ere I had reached the age of sixty.
I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick,
I made the garden, and for holiday
Rambled over the fields where sang the larks,
And by Spoon River gathering many a shell,
And many a flower and medicinal weed—
Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys.
At ninety-six I had lived enough, that is all,
And passed a sweet repose.
What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?
Degenerate sons and daughters,
Life is too strong for you—
It takes life to love Life.

ARLO WILL

Did you ever see an alligator
Come up to the air from the mud,
Staring blindly under the full glare of noon?
Have you seen the stabled horses at night
Tremble and start back at the sight of a lantern?
Have you ever walked in darkness
When an unknown door was open before you
And you stood, it seemed, in the light of a thousand candles
Of delicate wax?
Have you walked with the wind in your ears
And the sunlight about you,
And found it suddenly shine with an inner splendor?
Out of the mud many times,
Before many doors of light,
Through many fields of splendor,
Where around your steps a soundless glory scatters
Like new-fallen snow,
Will you go through earth, O strong of soul,
And through unnumbered heavens
To the final flame!

THOMAS TREVELYAN

Reading in Ovid the sorrowful story of Itys,
Son of the love of Tereus and Procne, slain
For the guilty passion of Tereus for Philomela,
The flesh of him served to Tereus by Procne,
And the wrath of Tereus, the murderess pursuing
Till the gods made Philomela a nightingale,
Lute of the rising moon, and Procne a swallow!
O livers and artists of Hellas centuries gone,
Sealing in little thuribles dreams and wisdom,
Incense beyond all price, forever fragrant,
A breath whereof makes clear the eyes of the soul!
How I inhaled its sweetness here in Spoon River!
The thurible opening when I had lived and learned

How all of us kill the children of love, and all of us,
Knowing not what we do, devour their flesh;
And all of us change to singers, although it be
But once in our lives, or change—alas!—to swallows,
To twitter amid cold winds and falling leaves!

ROBERT FULTON TANNER

If a man could bite the giant hand
That catches and destroys him,
As I was bitten by a rat
While demonstrating my patent trap,
In my hardware store that day.
But a man can never avenge himself
On the monstrous ogre Life.
You enter the room—that's being born;
And then you must live—work out your soul,
Aha, the bait that you crave is in view:
A woman with money you want to marry,
Prestige, place, or power in the world.
But there's work to do and things to conquer—
Oh, yes! the wires that screen the bait.
At last you get in—but you hear a step:
The ogre, Life, comes into the room,
(He was waiting and heard the clang of the spring)
To watch you nibble the wondrous cheese,
And stare with his burning eyes at you,
And scowl and laugh, and mock and curse you,
Running up and down in the trap,
Until your misery bores him.

WASHINGTON McNEELY

Rich, honored by my fellow citizens,
The father of many children, born of a noble mother,
All raised there
In the great mansion-house, at the edge of town.
Note the cedar tree on the lawn!

I sent all the boys to Ann Arbor, all the girls to Rockford,
The while my life went on, getting more riches and honors—
Resting under my cedar tree at evening.
The years went on.
I sent the girls to Europe;
I dowered them when married.
I gave the boys money to start in business.
They were strong children, promising as apples
Before the bitten places show.
But John fled the country in disgrace.
Jenny died in childbirth—
I sat under my cedar tree.
Harry killed himself after a debauch,
Susan was divorced—
I sat under my cedar tree.
Paul was invalided from overstudy,
Mary became a recluse at home for love of a man—
I sat under my cedar tree.
All were gone, or broken-winged or devoured by life—
I sat under my cedar tree.
My mate, the mother of them, was taken—
I sat under my cedar tree,
Till ninety years were tolled.
O maternal Earth, which rocks the fallen leaf to sleep!

FIDDLER JONES

The earth keeps some vibration going
There in your heart, and that is you.
And if the people find you can fiddle,
Why, fiddle you must, for all your life.
What do you see, a harvest of clover?
Or a meadow to walk through to the river?
The wind's in the corn; you rub your hands
For beeves hereafter ready for market;
Or else you hear the rustle of skirts
Like the girls when dancing at Little Grove.
To Cooney Potter a pillar of dust
Or whirling leaves meant ruinous drouth;
They looked to me like Red-Head Sammy

AARON HATFIELD

Stepping it off, to "Toor-a-Loor."
How could I till my forty acres,
Not to speak of getting more,
With a medley of horns, bassoons and piccolos
Stirred in my brain by crows and robins
And the creak of a windmill—only these?
And I never started to plow in my life
That some one did not stop in the road
And take me away to a dance or picnic.
I ended up with forty acres;
I ended up with a broken fiddle—
And a broken laugh, and a thousand memories,
And not a single regret.

AARON HATFIELD

Better than granite, Spoon River,
Is the memory-picture you keep of me
Standing before the pioneer men and women
There at Concord Church on Communion day.
Speaking in broken voice of the peasant youth
Of Galilee who went to the city
And was killed by bankers and lawyers;
My voice mingling with the June wind
That blew over wheat fields from Atterbury;
While the white stones in the burying ground
Around the Church shimmered in the summer sun.
And there, though my own memories
Were too great to bear, were you, O pioneers,
With bowed heads breathing forth your sorrow
For the sons killed in battle and the daughters
And little children who vanished in life's morning,
Or at the intolerable hour of noon.
But in those moments of tragic silence,
When the wine and bread were passed,
Came the reconciliation for us—
Us the plowmen and the hewers of wood,
Us the peasants, brothers of the peasant of Galilee—
To us came the Comforter,
And the consolation of tongues of flame!

DAISY FRASER

Did you ever hear of Editor Whedon
Giving to the public treasury any of the money he received
For supporting candidates for office?
Or for writing up the canning factory
To get people to invest?
Or for suppressing the facts about the bank,
When it was rotten and ready to break?
Did you ever hear of the Circuit Judge
Helping anyone except the "Q" railroad,
Or the bankers? Or did Rev. Peet or Rev. Sibley
Give any part of their salary, earned by keeping still,
Or speaking out as the leaders wished them to do,
To the building of the waterworks?
But I, Daisy Fraser, who always passed
Along the streets through rows of nods and smiles,
And coughs and words such as "there she goes,"
Never was taken before Justice Arnett
Without contributing ten dollars and costs
To the school fund of Spoon River!

EDITOR WHEDON

To be able to see every side of every question;
To be on every side, to be everything, to be nothing long;
To pervert truth, to ride it for a purpose,
To use great feelings and passions of the human family
For base designs, for cunning ends;
To wear a mask like the Greek actors—
Your eight-page paper—behind which you huddle,
Bawling through the megaphone of big type;
"This is I, the giant."
Thereby also living the life of a sneak-thief,
Poisoned with the anonymous words
Of your clandestine soul.
To scratch dirt over scandal for money,
And exhume it to the winds for revenge,

Or to sell papers,
Crushing reputations, or bodies, if need be;
To win at any cost, save your own life.
To glory in demoniac power, ditching civilization,
As a paranoiac boy puts a log on the track
And derails the express train.
To be an editor, as I was.
Then to lie here close by the river over the place
Where the sewage flows from the village,
And the empty cans and garbage are dumped,
And abortions are hidden.

ISAIAH BEETHOVEN

They told me I had three months to live,
So I crept to Bernadotte,
And sat by the mill for hours and hours
Where the gathered waters, deeply moving,
Seemed not to move:
O world, that's you!
You are but a widened place in the river
Where Life looks down and we rejoice for her
Mirrored in us, and so we dream
And turn away, but when again
We look for the face, behold the lowlands
And blasted cotton-wood trees where we empty
Into the larger stream!
But here by the mill the castled clouds
Mocked themselves in the dizzy water.
And over its agate floor at night
The flame of the moon ran under my eyes
Amid a forest stillness broken
By a flute in a hut on the hill.
At last when I came to lie in bed
Weak and in pain, with the dreams about me,
The soul of the river had entered my soul,
And the gathered power of my soul was moving
So swiftly it seemed to be at rest
Under cities of cloud and under

Spheres of silver and changing worlds—
Until I saw a flash of trumpets
Above the battlements over Time!

CAROLINE BRANSON

With our hearts like drifting suns, had we but walked,
As often before, the April fields till starlight
Silkened over with viewless gauze the darkness
Under the cliff, our trysting place in the wood,
Where the brook turns! Had we but passed from wooing
Like notes of music that run together, into winning,
In the inspired improvisation of love!
But to put back of us as a canticle ended
The rapt enchantment of the flesh,
In which our souls swooned, down, down,
Where time was not, nor space, nor ourselves—
Annihilated in love!
To leave these behind for a room with lamps:
And to stand with our Secret mocking itself,
And hiding itself amid flowers and mandolins,
Stared at by all between salad and coffee.
And to see him tremble, and feel myself
Prescient, as one who signs a bond—
Not flaming with gifts and pledges heaped
With rosy hands over his brow.
And then, O night! deliberate! unlovely!
With all of our wooing blotted out by the winning,
In a chosen room in an hour that was known to all!
Next day he sat so listless, almost cold,
So strangely changed, wondering why I wept.
Till a kind of sick despair and voluptuous madness
Seized us to make the pact of death.

A stalk of the earth-sphere,
Frail as starlight;
Waiting to be drawn once again
Into creation's stream.
But next time to be given birth.

Gazed at by Raphael and St. Francis
Sometimes as they pass.
For I am their little brother,
To be known clearly face to face
Through a cycle of birth hereafter run.
You may know the seed and the soil;
You may feel the cold rain fall,
But only the earth-sphere, only heaven
Knows the secret of the seed
In the nuptial chamber under the soil.
Throw me into the stream again,
Give me another trial—
Save me, Shelley!

DIPPOLD THE OPTICIAN

What do you see now?
Globes of red, yellow, purple.
Just a moment! And now?
My father and mother and sisters.
Yes! And now?
Knights at arms, beautiful women, kind faces.
Try this.
A field of grain—a city.
Very good! And now?
A young woman with angels bending over her.
A heavier lens! And now?
Many women with bright eyes and open lips.
Try this.
Just a goblet on a table.
Oh, I see! Try this lens!
Just an open space—I see nothing in particular.
Well, now!
Pine trees, a lake, a summer sky.
That's better. And now!
A book.
Read a page for me.
I can't. My eyes are carried beyond the page.
Try this lens.

Depths of air.
Excellent! And now!
Light, just light, making everything below it a toy world.
Very well, we'll make the glasses accordingly.

KINSEY KEENE

Your attention, Thomas Rhodes, president of the bank;
Coolbaugh Whedon, editor of the Argus;
Rev. Peet, pastor of the leading church;
A. D. Blood, several times Mayor of Spoon River;
And finally all of you, members of the Social Purity Club—
Your attention to Cambronne's dying words,
Standing with the heroic remnant
Of Napoleon's guard on Mount Saint Jean
At the battlefield of Waterloo,
When Maitland, the Englishman, called to them,
"Surrender, brave Frenchmen!"—
There at close of day, with the battle hopelessly lost,
And hordes of men, no longer the army
Of the great Napoleon,
Streamed from the field like ragged strips
Of thunder clouds in the storm.
Well, what Cambronne said to Maitland,
Ere the English fire made smooth the brow of the hill
Against the sinking light of day,
Say I to you, and all of you,
And to you, O world.
And I charge you to carve it
Upon my stone.

GRANVILLE CALHOUN

I wanted to be County Judge
One more term, so as to round out a service
Of thirty years.
But my friends left me and joined my enemies,
And they elected a new man.

HENRY C. CALHOUN

Then a spirit of revenge seized me,
And I infected my four sons with it,
And I brooded upon retaliation,
Until the great physician, Nature,
Smote me through with paralysis
To give my soul and body rest.
Did my sons get power and money?
Did they serve the people or yoke them,
To till and harvest fields of self?
For how could they ever forget
My face at my bedroom window,
Sitting helpless amid my golden cages
Of singing canaries,
Looking at the old courthouse?

HENRY C. CALHOUN

I reached the highest place in Spoon River,
But through what bitterness of spirit!
The face of my father, sitting speechless,
Childlike watching his canaries,
And looking at the courthouse window
Of the county judge's room,
And his admonitions to me to seek
My own life, and punish Spoon River
To avenge the wrong the people did him,
Filled me with furious energy
To seek for wealth and seek for power.
But what did he do but send me along
The path that leads to the grove of the Furies?
I followed the path and I tell you this:
On the way to the grove you'll pass the Fates,
Shadow-eyed, bent over their weaving.
Stop for a moment, and if you see
The thread of revenge leap out of the shuttle,
Then quickly snatch from Atropos
The shears and cut it, lest your sons,
And the children of them and their children
Wear the envenomed robe.

ARCHIBALD HIGBIE

I loathed you, Spoon River. I tried to rise above you,
I was ashamed of you. I despised you
As the place of my nativity.
And there in Rome, among the artists,
Speaking Italian, speaking French,
I seemed to myself at times to be free
Of every trace of my origin.
I seemed to be reaching the heights of art,
And to breathe the air that the masters breathed,
And to see the world with their eyes.
But still they'd pass my work and say:
"What are you driving at, my friend?
Sometimes the face looks like Apollo's,
At others it has a trace of Lincoln's."
There was no culture, you know, in Spoon River,
And I burned with shame and held my peace.
And what could I do, all covered over
And weighted down with western soil,
Except aspire, and pray for another
Birth in the world, with all of Spoon River
Rooted out of my soul?

RUTHERFORD McDOWELL

They brought me ambrotypes
Of the old pioneers to enlarge.
And sometimes one sat for me—
Some one who was in being
When giant hands from the womb of the world
Tore the republic.
What was it in their eyes?—
For I could never fathom
That mystical pathos of drooped eyelids,
And the serene sorrow of their eyes.
It was like a pool of water,
Amid oak trees at the edge of a forest,

THE VALLEY OF STILLNESS

Where the leaves fall,
As you hear the crow of a cock
From a far-off farm house, seen near the hills
Where the third generation lives, and the strong men
And the strong women are gone and forgotten.
And these grandchildren and great-grandchildren
Of the pioneers!
Truly did my camera record their faces, too,
With so much of the old strength gone,
And the old faith gone,
And the old mastery of life gone,
And the old courage gone,
Which labors and loves and suffers and sings
Under the sun!

THE VALLEY OF STILLNESS

Where is the hope of happiness,
And where the faith in friends,
And where the loyalty in love,
And where the peace of plenty that never came,
And where the sorrows that were of life,
And the struggles that ceased not,
And the laughter that turned to tears,
And the tears scorched dry in the dearth of days?—
All, all, are vanished in the Valley of Stillness
Beyond The Hill!

Their happiness was sown in shallow soil,
And its root withered.
Their faith was as water,
And the star of wormwood fell in it.
Their loyalty was broken as a pitcher,
And as the empty cup of a beggar
It was held to the day of palsied hands.
And their peace came and departed as summer.
And their struggles, and their laughter
Passed from silence to sound and to silence again:

Voices of the night which cry and cry not.—
All, all, are vanished and taken away
Into the Valley of Stillness
Beyond The Hill!

Victory and defeat are no more;
Deceit and trust are no more;
The gift of love is no more;
That which is received with gladness,
And that which is rejected is no more.
No more do they search here,
Nor desire here,
Nor wound, nor heal,
Nor plan, nor build,
Nor labor, nor take in marriage,
Nor slay, nor hunt, nor lust,
Nor envy, nor covet;
Nor wonder whether to eat or fast,
Deny or affirm,
Act or refrain from acting,
Stand back or dare;
Or whether to act and regard not,
Or act and think of the gain;
Or fight for the inner truth of the soul.
They laid down these burdens of earth
At the foot of The Hill,
Beyond which is the Valley of Stillness!

Where are the pure of heart,
The givers of gladness,
The eyes that misted with pity,
The eyes that shone with truth,
The hands whose touch was life,
The lips that withheld not kisses,
And spoke no evil;
The lovers, the singers, the dreamers,
Who knew the secrets of sacred gardens,
And told them in words that die not?
They were as white-winged eagles
Rising from the sea to heaven,

EZRA FINK

Even as waves that turn to eagles,
And fade into the light of the sky.
All, all, are vanished into the Valley of Stillness
Beyond The Hill!

Where is the Abyss that shall be closed,
And the Keys of Death that shall be broken?
Where is the Ark of the Covenant,
And the bowls of Gold with the prayers of the saints,
And the sea of glass mingled with fire?
Where is the search for righteousness,
And the visions of pure rivers of water,
And the city that has no need of the sun,
And the life everlasting?
Lo! the hope thereof is with us
In the village beside The Hill,
Which is this side the Valley of Stillness!

EZRA FINK

Raised in the faith of Elliott Hawkins of old,
Making my way as a hand on the farm,
Then teaching school, then becoming a lawyer;
Entering politics, cultivating the good people,
A church member too—
(Observe my lecture on the fall of Athens,
Due to her immoral and un-Christian life.)
Elected a judge at last of the City Court.
Then lifted up to a law partnership in Chicago,
Fighting the eight-hour day,
And consolidating industries.
On and on, up and up—always busy.
Abstemious, the husband of one wife—nothing else!
Called at last to the presidency of the Trust.
Master now of tens of thousands of workers,
And hundreds of millions of gold.
Taking over the little canning works of Spoon River;
Building a church in Spoon River,
Head of Spoon River's library board,

And supervising the selection of its books.
Building myself a great tomb in Spoon River,
For which these words are the inscription:
"Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."

HOWARD LAMSON

Ice cannot shiver in the cold,
Nor stones shrink from the lapping flame.
Eyes that are sealed, no more have tears;
Ears that are stopped hear nothing ill;
Hearts turned to silt are strange to pain;
Tongues that are dumb report no loss;
Hands stiffened, well may idle be;
No sigh is from a breathless breast.
Beauty may fade, but closed eyes see not;
Sorrow may wail, but stopped ears hear not;
Work is, but folded hands need work not;
Nothing to say is for dumb tongues.
The rolling earth rolls on and on
With trees and stones and winding streams—
My dream is what the hillside dreams!

YET SING LOW

Yee Bow was killed by the son of Rev. Wiley;
And they wound his pigtail around his head,
And buried him near Chase Henry.
No laundry for me,
But the Golden Pheasant,
Where I served steak as well as chop suey.
And I wore their clothes and cut my queue,
And read the magazines and the dailies,
No longer a Chinese heathen.
But did I forget my City of Flowers?
No! For I lighted my pipe and dreamed:
And the waterspouts on Bindle's Block
Were twisted dolphins on temple roofs;

ALBERT THURSTON

The ash barrels in the alley became
Buddhas in bronze by an ivied wall;
The water tower seemed like a pagoda
At Ta-Li Fu, and the lilac bushes
Spread into courtyards full of blossoms.
Ding! went the register, boom went the drum,
As the Salvation Army passed and shouted
The blood of the Lamb . . . but I heard the bells
And gongs of Buddha, on high, far away,
Where a poppy moon hangs over the hills
As yellow as moth wings, under a sky
As white as the shrines or the glistening streams
In the Valley of Fragrant Springs!

ALBERT THURSTON

Who lives where the eagle lives?
The lizard!
The lizard crawls at the feet of the eagle.
Who lives where the eagle lives?
The snake!
The snake is coiled by the eagle's nest!
Who soars where the eagle soars?
The vulture!
The condor!
But who clasps the crags in the lonely heights,
With the sunlight on his golden wings,
Crowned with the planet of morning?—
The eagle!

THOMAS MacCRACKEN

New commandments I give to you, Spoon River,
Out of the wisdom of living:
Thou shalt make graven images of all beautiful things;
Thou shalt take the name of God in vain,
For by unanswered prayers shall you be lifted up;
Thou shalt labor every day in the week,
Even as thy heart rests not;

Thou shalt give life;
Thou shalt love the woman who gives her love to thee,
Or else thou shalt not accept her love;
Thou shalt help to multiply the goods of the community;
Thou shalt tell the truth about thy neighbor,
And about thy enemy.
Thou shalt be free, joyous, tolerant, active.
Thou shalt trust death,
Having trusted and rejoiced in birth!

HENRY ZOLL, THE MILLER

Have you ever noticed the mill pond in the dog days?
How it breeds wriggling life,
And seethes and crackles with poisonous froth,
Then lies as still as a snake gone blind?
And how can the mill pond know itself
When its water has caked to scum and worms?
And how can it know the world or sky
When it has no mirror with which to see them?
But the river above the bend is wise:
Its waters are swift and cold and clear,
Always changing and always fresh,
And full of ripples and swirls and waves,
That image a thousand stars by night,
And a thousand phases of sun and clouds,
By a changing movie of forest and hills!
And down in its healthful depths the pickerel
Chase each other like silver shadows;
And the swift game fish swim up the stream.
Well, this is the soul of a man, my friend:
You brood at first, then froth with regret,
Then cake with hatred, and sink to dullness;
Or else you struggle and keep on the move,
Forget and solve and learn and emerge,
Full of sparkle and stars.
And down in your depths there's flashing laughter,
Swimming against the current!

JACOB BRAHAM

In your mortal days did you not see
That man is linked to every living thing
By kindred ties of physical substance and form,
And by ties of physical need and function?
And that the thing called life
Is the same, whether in plant or beast or man?
And when you saw that man's body was not alone
In the world of created beings,
And that man's life was not alone
In the world of living beings,
Did it not give you the hint that man's soul is not alone,
But is companioned and sustained
By genera of spirits,
And by hierarchies of gods,
Bound together by the same spiritual blood,
And rising by creative evolutions
To kinship with God Himself?

RITA MATLOCK GRUENBERG

Grandmother! You who sang to green valleys,
And passed to a sweet repose at ninety-six,
Here is your little Rita, at last
Grown old, grown forty-nine;
Here stretched on your grave under the winter stars,
With the rustle of oak leaves over my head;
Piecing together strength for the act,
Last thoughts, memories, asking how I am here!
After wandering afar, over the world,
Life in cities, marriages, motherhood—
(They all married, and I am homeless, alone.)
Grandmother! I have not lacked in strength,
Nor will, nor courage. No! I have honored you
With a life that used these gifts of your blood.
But I was caught in trap after trap in the years.

At last the cruelest trap of all.
Then I fought the bars, pried open the door,
Crawled through—but it suddenly sprang shut,
And tore me to death as I used your courage
To free myself!
Grandmother! Fold me to your breast again.
Make me earth with you for the blossoms of spring—
Grandmother!

TERESA PASHKOWSKY

How came this Japanese poppy
To bloom alone, far afield in a middle meadow,
With grasses and yellow buttercups around it,
Lifting its scarlet splendor, bright as a flame,
Like a ruddy moon, like a torch in the earthbound hands
Of buried Persephone, high over flowering weeds?—
A wind blew the seed from a lovely garden,
Over the soft warm waters at night, when the stars
Fringed down or lifted lashes of drowsy light
For the soothing heat of September.
But whence were you, Teresa Pashkowsky,
Here amid drug stores, movies, squabble and alleys,
Rising to song, and the soul of Lucia, Thaïs,
And fame in the world?

LINFORD NEWMAN

Triumphant amid the many realms of this life—
Realms of greed, of hate and of strife—
There is the realm of the wise and the just,
Lying above us as a glory within a glory,
To which we can rise for fellowship,
As a plant stands up from the breaking hands of the wind
To the air and dew of heaven!
Realm of vision! Realm of truth! Realm of love!
Open to us in hours of doubt and pain
When black hands claw us from the pit.

SARAH DEWITT

This is the good faith of the perseverance of the saints,
Raised to the higher heaven of Beauty!
O, great ones who are dead, yet live;
And O, ye living ones over the earth,
Who shall never die,
Leave ajar the gates of your paradise of light
That we may commune with you;
And rise from the commonalty of little living
To the fellowship of wisdom and dreams!

SARAH DEWITT

Because I believed God brought him to me,
And because I believed him gifted of God
With honor, truth and love of the right,
I believed in God and worshipped God.
And then when I found he was just a thief,
And full of treasons and perjuries,
All for money and worldly pride,
The wreck of him was the wreck of God;
And so I fainted amid the ruins
Of plaster and sticks, and sat in the stillness
That followed the fallen bust of God.
Friends, it is folly to prison God
In any house that is built with hands,
In man or woman, or passionate hopes,
Or the love of Truth, or the Rock of Ages.
For all will change, deceive or crumble,
As soon as you think you have prisoned God.
For God is Proteus, and flies like magic
From earth to heaven, from hope to hope.
You never can catch Him, and this is the reason:
The game of the soul is never to find,
The game of the soul is to follow!

CLEANTHUS TRILLING

The urge of the seed: the germ.
The urge of the germ: the stalk.
The urge of the stalk: leaves.
The urge of leaves: the blossom.
The urge of the blossom: to scatter pollen.
The urge of the pollen: the imagined dream of life.
The urge of life: longing for to-morrow.
The urge of to-morrow: Pain.
The urge of Pain: God.

IMANUEL REEDY

Not you, son of Joseph and Mary,
The carpenter's son, the ax at the root of the tree;
Not you, Jesus of Nazareth,
The wonder worker, and healer of the blind;
Not you, the offspring of David,
Preaching sedition against Cæsar;
Not you the King of the Jews,
Restorer of the throne, the power of Israel;
Not you the consolation of Judah,
The mediator, the propitiation, the judge, the rabbi;
Not you, the stone of stumbling, the head of the church;
Not you, whose words and works
Are the substance of customs and creeds,
And that law which you uprooted, but which grew again;
Nor even you the friend of publicans and harlots,
The feaster, the liver, the sweet companion;
Nor even you the first fruits of them that are asleep—
But you, the son of God, the man of sorrows,
The vine and the witness
Of youth's swift dream, and manhood's lingering pain,
And faith whose root is dead but lives again;
You the symbol of immemorial betrayal,
The agony fulfilled, the occult sacrifice;

RICHARD HARNED

You, the High Priest of the Greater Mysteries,
Of birth and death and life renewed,
Ritualist of the rose of Sharon, the song of the morning star,
Fulfiller of the law of the soul;
You, the Word that was with God, and is made flesh;
Great Seal of the marytrdom of man, you the cross,
The hieroscript of Life. . . .
O ineffable Christ!

RICHARD HARNED

Golden bees at the heart of violets,
Heavy with starry wine of the flower,
The lizard lurks for you there in the thickets
Armed in mimesis green as the leaves.
The emerald wasp is watching the clay pots,
All day filled with your spoil of the June;
The Fab in terminal scarf of azure,
And breast bedecked in Florentine gold,
Thirsts for the fruit of your toil for children
Born of her, pressed by the will to life.
And the small gray flies come trooping after
Wasps and Fabs with shark-toothed jaws.
What is it all but a great devouring?
What but Nature that passes us on
From stomach to stomach, till man the spirit
Fights against spirit, devouring, devoured?
Golden bees! I died believing
All mounts up to some finest life,
All is love, and the death of loving;
And if there is life that is higher than Art
It's peace that shines in God!

JOSEPH REVELL

Scale after scale of you,
Truth after truth of you peel to the core of truth,

The white, hard center of realest life.
Break the sheath and crack the shell,
Find the kernel that springs to a greener leaf,
A richer flower.
Giving gifts to purchase peace,
For acclaim, for the sake of conscience,
Or to quiet the hour of death: seed leaves,
Tear them off till you reach the core of giving,
Giving to find your soul and perfect your soul.
Love: the frayed and dusted scale of sex;
Love of family: the lioness and her cubs;
Love of your fellows: winning love for yourself—
Tear all away to the monad crystal, yourself . . .
Love that burns for the truth of love,
Love a star, not a moon!

ANGELA SANGER

In March when the melting eaves are a prism's edge,
And icicles burn at the tips with scarlet flame,
And drip to a rataplan of chrysolites;
When the drift of a white-winged cloud is over the tree tops
That lean to a flapping gale from the yellow ravine—
Then the dream of a garden returned to me, and I walked
Where the stalks of rusted sunflowers lisped the breeze.
And what were last year's failures, frosts and worms?
I would plant again for the joy of growing things;
Fight for the corn of life, for the blossoms of beauty.
And with every spring with a heart that never tired,
The dream of winning a love that should thrive, be free
Of cares that choke, betrayals that break, or doubts
That chill the leaves put forth to a sanguine sun!
O, garden by which I lived! O, earth of my heart!
How was it enriched by the fallen stalks of hope?
What did I gather but strength to struggle in Springs
Of the blue sky thrill of the dream?

ROBERT CHAIN

There are two ways in life,
And I tried them both:
First a life of no change,
Life like a gull, which has no dream
But to be a gull, fly over the waters,
Seeking its food, and to nest and sleep!
And then I became a creature that nurses
Growth and mutation in the brain,
Swims to land and turns its fins to legs.
Sensing a shriveled life ahead,
And loathing the weary hour,
I changed myself to renew myself,
And lost myself!

THE END.

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